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The Arches of the Years

by Brian Yu

HONG KONG LIFE STORIES NO. 1



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The Arches of the Years

Brian Yu
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by Brian Yu

加港文獻館

Canada-Hong Kong Resource Centre

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Hong Kong Life Stories No.1

Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies
Toronto, 1999

Canada and Hong Kong Research Project
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Hong Kong Life Stories: Series Editors' Preface

Hong Kong has evolved from a colonial port on the China coast to a major centre of the global economy and a metropolis with a distinct way of life, over the half century since the Second World War. It is undoubtedly a Chinese society; it is also an open, pluralistic and civil society. Social and cultural development has gone hand in hand with the economic, but has been much less well documented in the scholarly literature or the popular press.

Many men and women contributed to the making of Hong Kong society. Some were rich and famous, or did great deeds which were recorded in print or on stone. Most just struggled quietly to survive in difficult conditions, to maintain their self-respect, and to raise their children. The life stories of these men and women give us a deeper, fuller understanding of the evolution of Hong Kong.

In this series, we plan to publish Hong Kong life stories from diverse perspectives. There will be books in a variety of genres, such as autobiographies, biographies, oral histories and collections of representative works. With these publications, we hope to further the aims of the Canada and Hong Kong Project, viz., to chronicle the development of Hong Kong and to make Hong Kong better understood in Canada. The authors are responsible for their own opinions, which do not necessarily represent those of the Project or the editors.

Mr. Brian Yu, the author of *The Arches of the Years*, is the youngest son of nine siblings. Their father had a Classical Chinese education, graduated from Oxford, and served as a vernacular school inspector in the Hong Kong Government. Brian was educated by the Jesuits before the war. After the fall of Hong Kong, the family fled to Free China. Early in the postwar years, he won a scholarship to attend Cambridge where he became the first Chinese graduate to be recruited by Shell International Petroleum for service in Hong Kong. He had a successful career with Shell, while his siblings pursued theirs in law, in education and in scholarship. He was a pioneer in the early stages of Hong Kong's process of de-colonization and made many contributions to society. He immigrated to Canada in 1968. After working in turn for the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada and the Treasury Board, he rejoined Shell in Toronto. He is fully integrated into Canadian society, and remains close to his far-flung family.

December 1998

Diana Lary
Bernard Luk
Series Editors

*For
Christine and Catherine*

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Foreword

Walt Whitman wrote 'This is no book, who touches this, touches a man'. This may indeed be said of Brian's book, but perhaps it would be even better to say that one touches a family. The title is full of symbolism. Arches are often bridges and bridges often link very different places. A bridge can link two contrasting sides of a river or, as in a Roman aqueduct striding across Europe, bring water from mountains to plains. So it is with Brian's story. It links the ancient culture of China with the hectic life of a western city and the learning of the East with the mechanization of the West.

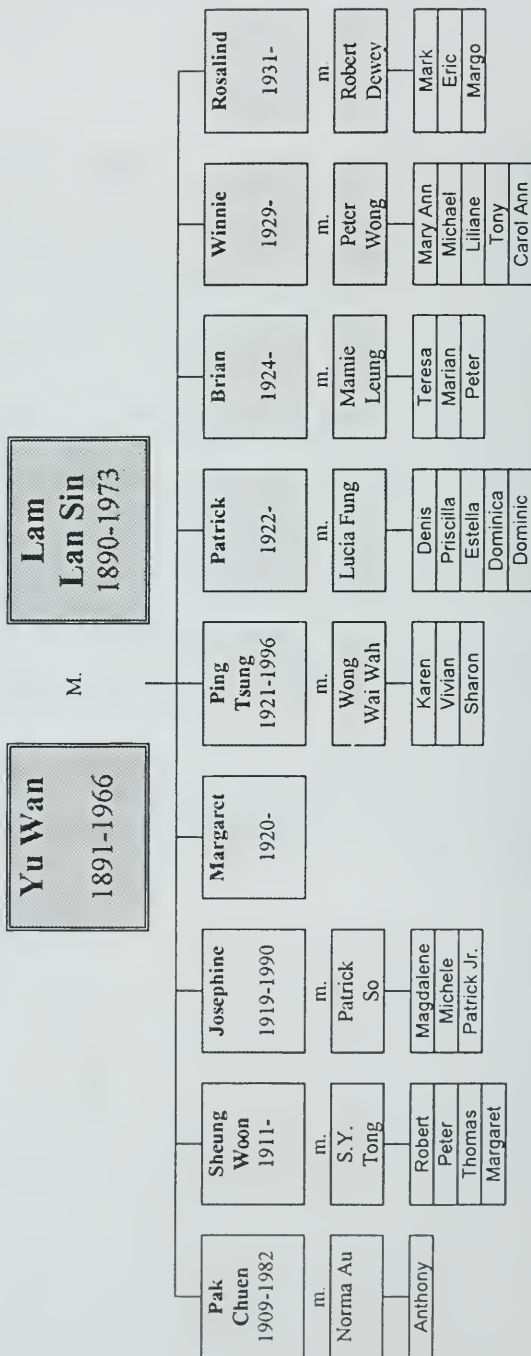
Half a century has passed since Brian and I were fortunate enough to find ourselves in one of the world's great universities. Cambridge is, in itself, a bridge which spans the learning of the ages, which embraces the genius of Keynes and Newton, Rutherford and Milton. Doubtless this helped Brian to build his bridges.

As we walked together in the meadows of Grantchester those many years ago little did I think that, one day, he would join me in the fascinating project of getting a brand new system of industrial relations to work for the professionals of the Public Service of Canada.

Now we are both happily retired in a great country far from the lands that nurtured our roots. This little book lets us touch Brian and his family as they travelled over the many arches which have marked their journey.

Leslie W.C.S. Barnes

The Yu Family Tree



Introduction

In the preface to *All Our Yesterdays: A Song of My Parents*, which appeared as a private publication in 1992, I wrote as follows:

I first gave serious thought to writing a short story of my parents in December 1989, something like a song of praise rather than a biography. I informed my brothers and sisters early in 1990 of my intention and asked for their help in the writing of the story, to be called *A Song of My Parents*.

Later Father Albert Cooney S.J., my former French teacher, suggested an alternative title, *All Our Yesterdays*. The idea appealed to me and I subsequently decided on the present title, *All Our Yesterdays: A Song of My Parents*, with a view to broadening the scope for my reminiscences without losing sight of the main theme.

My story is based on facts, on my memories and perceptions of the past and on the recollections of my brothers and sisters. I have attempted to place many of the events taking place in my story in the context of history. In this regard I have drawn freely from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Churchill's memoirs of *The Second World War*, Barbara Tuchman's *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*, and Major Oliver Stanley's *The Lasting Honour: The Fall of Hong Kong*.

In the years that followed, I have revised *All Our Yesterdays* in accordance with the dictates of mind and the whims of memory, and added the story of my chequered career in some detail. Hence, *The Arches of the Years*, the memoirs of a Chinese Canadian with a family history going all the way back to the Opium War.

My sincere thanks are due to Leslie Barnes, past President and former Executive Director of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, former Senior Research Fellow of Queen's University, Kingston, and currently First National Vice-President, Federal Superannuates National Association, for the foreword; Wilfred Saunders C.B.E., Emeritus Professor of the University of Sheffield and Professor Anthony Hudson of the University of

Liverpool for their helpful comments on some of the chapters; my nephew Professor Anthony Yu of the University of Chicago for the account of his unique relationship with my father in the early postwar years; my sister Margaret for permission to quote from her poem in memory of my mother; and my sister Mrs. Winnie Wong for the translation of one of my father's Oxford poems.

I am indeed grateful to my friend Eleanor DeWolf who proofread the constantly evolving manuscript, to my son Peter who undertook the formatting of the final manuscript, and to my wife Mamie who prepared the glossary of Chinese names.

I am greatly indebted to Professor Bernard Luk of York University who so kindly accepted my memoirs for publication by the Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies and also contributed to a number of key improvements in the manuscript. I wish to thank Peter Yeung of the Canada-Hong Kong Resource Centre for putting me in touch with the Joint Centre in the first place, and Janet Rubinoff, Editor for the Canada and Hong Kong Project, for proofreading the final manuscript.

I must gratefully acknowledge that some of my comments on Cambridge are taken from *Cambridge, A Living Tradition* by Michael Grant, and *Cambridge Colleges* by Janet Jeacock.

CHAPTER 1

Fountainhead, 1839-42

‘Happy is he who has three wives and four concubines.’ Such is the essence of an ancient Chinese saying, so close to the hearts of men, which has been scrupulously handed down through the ages.

Under successive Chinese Dynasties, most men took pride in being polygamists, while many women, usually from underprivileged families, found shelter and security as concubines. Tradition also conferred the dignity of social status on a man’s official concubines by recognizing all their offspring as legitimate. Hence, it was universally acknowledged that being someone’s concubine would not undermine a woman’s self-respect or compromise her sense of virtue. In such a compassionate society, it is tempting to speculate that true bastards could well have been hard to find!

My grandfather was born sometime during the Opium War of 1839-42. This infamous conflict was occasioned by Chinese resistance to British opium trade in the heyday of gunboat diplomacy and, as the world knows, constitutes an inglorious page in British history. In the event, Captain Charles Elliott seized Hong Kong in 1841 and, a year later, aboard the *HMS Cornwallis* moored on the Yangtze River, China signed the *Treaty of Nanking* ceding Hong Kong ‘in perpetuity’ to Britain. Never before in the history of China had the Sleeping Giant been so humiliated by a foreign power, and the credibility of the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), the last Chinese Dynasty, was shattered beyond redemption.

Hong Kong in Chinese means ‘fragrant harbour’. At first sight it was a mere rocky island of about seventy-seven square kilometres (17.7 km. long and from 3.2 km. to 8 km. wide), sparsely inhabited and pirate-infested. But to the shrewd and far-sighted builders of the British Empire, the commercial and strategic significance of its deep and sheltered harbour, possessing east and west entrances and lying in the chief trade route to China, was beyond all question a pearl of very great price.

In 1860, after another brief war, the eight square kilometres of the Kowloon peninsula, which dominates the Hong Kong harbour from the north, was ceded by China under the *Convention of Peking*. Britain in 1898 was further granted a ninety-nine year lease of nine hundred thirty-four square kilometres of the mainland

immediately adjoining Kowloon, known ever since as the New Territories.

Of humble origin, my grandfather came from the well-known Yu clan which populated the poor county of Taishan in Guangdong Province. As a young man he and his two elder brothers went to seek their fortunes in nearby Guangzhou, the thriving provincial capital situated at the mouth of the Pearl River, lying 144 kilometres north-west of Hong Kong. There, finding his Midas touch in building and banking, he prospered.

My grandfather had four wives or, more precisely, one wife and three concubines. His wife was the undisputed mistress of the house to whom each concubine, when formally received into the family, had to kowtow in the presence of relatives and friends. She was regarded by all his children as their first mother, and the three concubines their second, third, and fourth mother respectively.

After the death of my grandfather's wife, the first concubine became by custom his 'replacement' wife, although still addressed by the children as their second mother. When my grandfather passed away at the beginning of the twentieth century, his third concubine was only seventeen. He must have gone to his rest smug in the conviction that, by contemporary standards, his amorous acquisitions were neither so many as to excite envy, nor so few as to arouse sympathy.

Today, as I write my story, scattered in many countries around the world, including Australia, Canada, China, England, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States are the numerous descendants of my grandfather. None of them, to my best knowledge and belief, has managed to equal, let alone surpass, his bona fide achievements in matrimony.

CHAPTER 2

The Bonds of Tradition, 1908

The first of my grandfather's three concubines, later his 'replacement' wife, was a peasant woman. In March 1891 she gave birth in Guangzhou to a big and healthy baby boy, who was called Wan, with Yat Man as a second name. As time went by, the boy was rigorously schooled in literature and history, in accordance with tradition, and no expense was spared in engaging seasoned private tutors to spur his academic development. Yu Wan was my father.

In Imperial China, the scholar was from time immemorial respected and acclaimed as the élite of society, ahead of the peasant, the artisan and the merchant, in that order. The scholar's stature was further enhanced and bolstered by the glittering prospects of fame, rank and fortune that were enshrined in the education system for his benefit.

At the heart of the system was the Imperial Civil Service Examination, based exclusively on calligraphy and the writing of Confucian essays. It was administered at three progressive levels, the lower two levels being held respectively in the prefectural and provincial capitals, and the final level conducted solely in Beijing with the Prime Minister as Chief Examiner, under the auspices of the Emperor.

Whoever passed the final level of examination would be assured of appointment as a *kuan* or mandarin in the Imperial Civil Service. At the same time the top three successful candidates would be presented to the Emperor by the Prime Minister, and singled out for major appointments. The first of the three – in other words, the best scholar of the year – might even be offered as his bride the daughter of either the Emperor or the Prime Minister. Not surprisingly, the paths pursued by the best and the brightest in the empire all led to Beijing. It was indeed the common dream of parents to see their son donning the brilliant silk robe of a *kuan*, revered for his learning, admired for his station, and feared for his authority. My grandfather, I can safely hazard a guess, must also have shared in such a dream.

However, the Imperial Civil Service Examination, aptly described by Barbara Tuchman, the distinguished American writer, as the Great Wall of Chinese culture, was abolished by Imperial Edict in September 1905 as a belated gesture of reform in the dying

days of the Qing Dynasty. At about the same time my grandfather died. Under the guidance of an elder brother, an intellectual some ten years his senior, my father continued with his studies, blossoming into a brilliant young scholar endowed with an excellent command of Chinese classics, a keen sense of history, and a natural gift for poetry.

While still a teenager my father had his first taste of romance, albeit strictly in the fashion of his times. One day, he found on his bedside table a pile of photographs of pretty young girls whom he had never met. Compiled by professional matchmakers with due regard to each girl's appearance, attainment and family background, the photographs had been placed there by his mother in the hope that one of them might capture his fancy. She was not to be disappointed. Next morning a single photograph was seen pinned to the wall above my father's bed.

It was the picture of a beautiful girl in an elegant cheongsam. She was comfortably seated in a charming pose, with her hands resting on her lap. Her gaze, neither seeking nor avoiding attention, indicated a woman at peace with herself. A suppressed smile implied self-confidence, but without the desire to impress or to please. There was something about her bearing which gave a hint of class and character. Her name was Lam Lan Sin.

For many centuries, girls from the upper classes were compelled by custom to have their feet bound from early childhood, to prevent them from growing longer than three inches. The shape of diminutive feet was seen as a symbol of feminine charm and eroticism, but such binding of feet was, of course, nothing short of a barbarous act of slow and prolonged torture leading to permanent disability. Luckily for Lan Sin, her parents were enlightened enough to recognize the folly of the custom and courageous enough to defy convention. Thus, she was spared the ordeal.

Lan Sin's two uncles were *kuans*. Her father was a successful businessman who, in his young days, had passed the first level of the Imperial Civil Service Examination. Lan Sin's mother loved music and, as a rare accomplishment, even learnt to play the flute. By all accounts, the Lams were worthy of esteem and, indeed, a family alliance.

Whether my father was allowed any opportunity to find out for himself something more about his pinup girl was of little consequence. His mother promptly decided to have Lan Sin for her daughter-in-law. At the same time the coy young maiden was unequivocally told by her parents that Yu Wan would be the ideal husband for her. Through the buzzing matchmakers, matrimonial

preparations were quickly begun between the two families. In his later life my father was fond of telling his children tongue-in-cheek that, like the *Vicar of Wakefield*, he had indeed chosen his wife wisely, 'not for a fine glossy surface, but such qualities as would wear well'!

Dating, as we know it, was definitely not on the calendar of premarital events and, in the fine tradition of a blind marriage, it was on their wedding night, in 1908, that my father spoke to my mother for the first time. He was then seventeen, a year younger than his bride. Like all men of his time, he was wearing a pigtail. His bride, as a sign of attaining womanhood, had her hair knotted in a bun. Such was the beginning of an arbitrary partnership that was to remain constant and true over almost sixty years, despite the many changes in my parents' lives and in the world around them.

Though strangers to each other, my parents came from similar backgrounds. Destiny brought them together as husband and wife. Tradition instilled in their wedding vows a lasting sense of commitment. Mutual love, respect, understanding and tolerance, sprouting and nurtured over time, strengthened their bonds of wedlock. The growing family focussed and sustained their common interests. Unselfish love and dedication set them apart as exemplary parents, whose steadfast sense of values served as a constant source of inspiration to their children.

CHAPTER 3

The Beginning of Change, 1909-11

Honeymoons as such were simply unheard of in my parents' time. My father resumed his scholastic pursuits immediately after marriage, while his bride came under daily scrutiny by all her mothers-in-law. In the following year, 1909, a son, Pak Chuen, was born. Then suddenly, Guangzhou came under the scourge of bubonic plague, and my maternal grandmother was one of many who fell victim to the epidemic. My father and his brother, accompanied by their mothers, moved hastily with their families to Hong Kong.

In *Farewell the Trumpets*, the third volume of *The Pax Britannica Trilogy*, Jan Morris stated the following:

'I began to wonder', wrote the young revolutionary Sun Yat Sen (1866-1925), 'how it was that...Englishmen could do such things as they have done with the barren rock of Hong Kong within seventy or eighty years, while in four thousand years China had achieved nothing like it.'

It is, therefore, not altogether surprising that the seemingly inconsequential little British Colony soon opened the window of my father's mind to fresh perspectives. The importance of English in the world at large dawned on him, and he quickly resolved to make a real effort to learn the language. Brushing embarrassment aside, he took his first English lessons at the age of eighteen or nineteen at the Lingnan Primary School, which was sponsored by American missionaries. He was so much older and bigger than his new classmates that he made himself very popular by carrying them, one after another, on his shoulders during recreation periods. Before long he joined St. Stephen's College, then the leading English school in Hong Kong, where he was first introduced to Western history and world geography.

Meanwhile civil and political discontent and unrest had been spreading in many parts of China, and the writing appeared on the wall for the tottering Manchu Government. On October 10, 1911 troops mutinied in the historic city of Wuchang, quickening the

tempo of events that soon led to the fall of the Qing Dynasty. To mark the dawning of a new era, men of all ages jubilantly cut off their pigtailed and young women eagerly got rid of their foot bindings. It should not be too far-fetched to draw a parallel between those largely-forgotten symbolic events and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the toppling of Lenin and Karl Marx statues in modern times.

As the winds of change swept over China, Hong Kong was cast by the happy combination of geography and British policy in the fateful role of the good Samaritan in the context of Sino-British relations, and began capturing world attention as a haven for people and capital fleeing from instability on the mainland. Thereafter, steadfast adherence by London to the established policy of enlightened self-interest has been a key factor in shaping the major currents of economic forces and social change in Hong Kong until its return to China in 1997.

The change of scene and circumstances seemed propitious for my parents. A daughter, Sheung Woon, arrived in December 1911. By that time my father had already made up his mind to embark on a crucial voyage of discovery.

CHAPTER 4

Oxford, 1912-16

In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, countless young men with little or no education emigrated from impoverished regions in south China to other countries in search of a livelihood. With few exceptions, they left their families behind, hoping someday either to return home with new-found wealth or to bring them over to the adopted country. Most of them found work as unskilled labour, often under wretched terms and conditions. Such were the many thousands of Chinese coolies who helped build the Canadian Pacific Railway, performing backbreaking work for much less than the wages paid to a white man, and many of whom died in the process.

At the other end of the social spectrum, those enjoying wealth and station in China traditionally looked askance at travel even within the country, for fear of poor roads, deficient transport or rampant banditry. Journeying afar to foreign lands, deemed to be uncivilized, was frowned upon as an even less attractive proposition. Few felt the need or cultivated the desire to go abroad for the express purpose of pursuing Western knowledge and learning. Nonetheless, by the turn of the century, the first trickle of Chinese students could be seen returning from the United States and Europe with their degrees and the trappings of Western culture.

My father was accustomed to a sedate and trammelled way of life in a conservative and parochial society where time had more or less stood still for generations. At the age of twenty, happily married, he was quietly relishing the fruits of my grandfather's legacy. Why should he be the first in the family to forsake the charms of habit and break the fetters of tradition by venturing overseas?

But destiny kept beckoning him. Prodded by an enquiring mind, spurred by ambition, and steeled by a plucky spirit, he grew restless and discontented with the status quo. There was no one close to him who could offer meaningful advice. Still, as his thoughts veered increasingly towards the future, he was consumed with a burning desire to further his education abroad, expand his horizons, and join the vanguard of the new Chinese generation.

The decision to leave home having been made, he finalized

arrangements for his wife and two children to stay with his mother and the elder brother who was his former mentor. Early in 1912, he was on board a steamer sailing across the Pacific to San Francisco. At least, so he thought. To begin with, he was seasick most of the way and confined much of the time to his cabin. Weeks later, when the ship docked at its final destination, he learnt to his utter amazement that he had landed in Liverpool!

At this critical juncture, some kind soul my father had probably met by sheer chance on board his ship, perhaps a good fairy posing as an Englishman, spirited him to Oxford, which he had barely heard of by name, and placed him in the hands of an experienced tutor. Bewildered, speaking little English and knowing less about Western culture, he could not have been a more unlikely candidate for the world's most prestigious university. But, having fallen in love with Oxford at first sight, he dauntlessly accepted the challenge. In the ensuing months he threw himself wholeheartedly into the task of cramming for entrance examinations which were so alien to him. To add to the obstacles barring his way, he had to take French as a second language. Incredibly, in the autumn of 1913, he gained admission to Merton College. He was now an Oxford undergraduate. It proved to be the turning point in his life. This was his finest hour.

Merton, founded in 1264, is Oxford's third oldest college, after University (1249) and Balliol (1263); however, it was the earliest organized college. Among my precious collections are some photographs of my father strolling in Merton Garden. Six feet tall and sturdy in build, he is smartly attired in a sports suit with matching bow tie and cap. His clean-shaven face is marked by a determined countenance and a penetrating gaze. With handsome looks, dignified charm and imposing presence, he comes across like a delightful blend of Cary Grant, Ronald Colman and Laurence Olivier!

To return to the realm of reality, my father's life as an undergraduate was anything but a bed of roses. After all he had spent three years, at the most, learning the rudiments of English in Hong Kong and less than eighteen months preparing for Oxford. It boggles the mind that, despite his limited English and lack of relevant academic background, he was attending the same lectures and tutorials as native students from famous public schools. Indeed the recurring weekly academic activities, which most undergraduates simply took for granted, amounted to an intimidating uphill struggle for my father. I can well believe that he virtually ate and slept with his dictionary, especially his Anglo-Chinese dictionary. Years

afterwards, some of his textbooks from Oxford were discovered by his children to be filled, page after page, with minute Chinese notations pertaining to both the meaning and pronunciation of the English text.

Fortune intervened when Sir John Miles, a tutor at Merton, took my father under his wing. Intrigued by the atypical student, Sir John was unsparing in his efforts to guide my father patiently, term after term, through the academic maze. Indeed the tutor was as helpful and understanding as the student was keen and persevering, and they did each other justice. In my father's own words, Sir John made it possible for him to succeed at Oxford. No wonder that, in years to come, Sir John's photograph permanently occupied pride of place in my father's home in Hong Kong. It also transpired, shortly after the Second World War, that Sir John remembered my father only too well.

Throughout his university days, my father did not take part in any kind of sports or attend debates at the Oxford Union. He was simply short of time. It must also have been a real burden at first for him to converse in English. Unduly self-conscious, he chose not to disclose to anyone that he had a wife and two children in Hong Kong. Making friends at Oxford certainly did not come easily to him. However, as he gained in confidence, he made conscious efforts to hobnob with fellow-students, seeking every opportunity to improve his speech. Himself a teetotaller, he quickly picked up the habit of offering a glass of sherry to anyone dropping in on him in his corner suite in college, located on the second floor of Staircase 3 in St. Albans Quad, overlooking Merton Garden and Christ Church Meadow beyond. By degrees, he became more attuned to his new environment; his black gown hung more comfortably over his shoulders; and he was profoundly impressed by the unmistakable attributes of an English gentleman.

My father wrote home regularly. Unfortunately, my mother could not correspond with him simply because, like most of her contemporary countrywomen, she had not been taught how to compose a meaningful letter. He had to be content with hearing from her indirectly through his brother. Later, to add to his concerns, mail would either be delayed or disrupted by the war at sea. He was grief-stricken when news arrived that his mother had passed away.

By the time my father began his second year at Oxford, England was already at war with Germany. Before long many of his contemporaries were voluntarily joining up, one after another, to fight for King and Country, leaving Oxford a little emptier day by

day. He kept wondering how many would ever return. He himself never saw any of them again.

My earliest impressions of the First World War were garnered from my father, who used to hold us in awe by recounting war stories after dinner. Sometimes he would even sing a few bars from *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*, his favourite war tune, to liven up the evening. On one occasion, describing an air raid over London in 1915, he recalled dramatically how he had been wonder-struck by the sight of a stately Zeppelin suddenly coming into view, 'floating like a giant cigar in mid-air'. He also spoke highly of Churchill, time and again, as a towering wartime figure. Little did I dream that I myself would be caught up some day in another world war, and Churchill would take over the centre of the world stage.

History poignantly remembers 1916 as the year in which some two million young men from the opposing armies were slaughtered at Verdun and the Somme. But on a happy personal note, my father graduated that summer. Four years earlier he had arrived in England inadvertently, an awkward foreigner eager to learn, but not knowing where to begin. Now he was leaving with a glowing sense of pride and an Oxford degree. He had acquired a sound knowledge of the English language and a cultured accent. He had learnt to respect England's historic institutions and to admire the English way of life. Indeed, he was so full of Oxford that the original mould of his intellectual and moral outlook had been recast and fused with the best in English culture.

As the day of departure drew nearer, my father was conscious of a haunting premonition that he would probably never return to the dreaming spires of Oxford, the scene of so much academic struggle and personal achievement. He could hardly bear the thought of leaving his Merton rooms behind: If only he could have foreseen that, some day, those very same rooms in St. Albans Quad would be occupied by one of his sons and that, another generation later, a grandson would also be a proud member of Merton!

CHAPTER 5

Homecoming, 1916

For the long journey back to Hong Kong, while Europe was still at war, it was my father's original intention to have a distant cousin for company. However, the latter was anxious to return via the Indian Ocean by first opportunity, and paid little heed to the danger of travelling in a vessel flying the British flag. My father preferred to play safe by taking an American ship to the United States, where he could also do some sightseeing before going home across the Pacific. Eventually they went their separate ways. His cousin sailed from England, the ship was torpedoed by a U-boat, and the poor man was lost at sea.

My father embarked later for the United States. On the way his ship caught fire, but the captain and his crew successfully fought the blaze and calmly prevented the situation from getting out of control. None of the first-class passengers, my father among them, knew anything about the incident until after arrival at New York!

I have no knowledge of the places my father visited or the people he met while in the United States. It was sometime late in 1916 when he returned joyfully to my mother's arms.

During his long absence, my mother and her two children were staying with my father's elder brother and his large family in a three-storey house at 11 Queen's Road East, Wanchai, part of my grandfather's legacy. Also living under the same roof were my father's own mother, his two younger sisters, and my grandfather's youngest concubine. As a long-term house guest, my mother could not have had an easy or happy time bringing up two young children in the crowded conditions while coping with the awkward family setting. But her spirit did not falter, and her common sense and ability to adapt to trying circumstances enabled her to come through with flying colours. Those very attributes would stand her in good stead in hard times during the Second World War.

After savouring the euphoria of reunion, my parents settled down to a new phase of their lives together. At first my father was apprehensive that my mother would not appreciate the ways in which England had changed him, but his anxieties were quickly dispelled. Even though it was beyond her to understand what Oxford meant, she loved and adored him nonetheless as her hero,

with all her faculties of emotion and admiration. For her part, my mother was afraid that he might no longer care for her after having been away for so many years, years in which she had not been able to write him even once. However, her fears soon evaporated. His love for her had by no means been chilled by prolonged separation. He had been faithful to her, and he went out of his way to reassure her that she would always remain the only woman in his life. It was a promise he would keep till the end of his days.

It did not take my parents long to start looking for a suitable apartment in the Wanchai area, and to move into the first home of their own. However, eager to offer his services to the young and fragile Republic, my father left shortly afterwards for a fact-finding tour of China. He travelled far and wide, stopping off at major cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Wuchang, Hankou, Tianjin and Beijing. Everywhere he went, he called on friends and made new contacts. He also visited the West Lake, the Great Wall and other famous attractions, and the sense of awe and exhilaration that surged through him at the sight of their beauty and grandeur was later captured for posterity in his glowing Chinese verse.

Unfortunately, while the scenery delighted him, the politics depressed him. In the course of his travels, the impression grew on him that the leaders of the day were largely drawn from disparate groups of self-seeking adventurers, with few qualifications to govern, with little concern for public welfare or national interests, and lacking a vision of the country's future. By the time he arrived back in Hong Kong, he had become quite disillusioned. All thoughts of pursuing a career in politics or government in China had been driven from his mind.

At the time China was teetering on the brink of a long and bitter civil conflict among warlords, each bent on protecting and extending his own domain. In hindsight, what the country sorely needed at that critical stage of her history was a Napoleon, not someone aspiring to emulate 'the Younger' Pitt. It was the wrong time and the wrong place for a bicultural and peace-loving Oxonian, motivated by humanitarian interests and lofty ideals.

My father next tried his hand at business in partnership with friends, but it was not an unqualified success. At this point his fortunes took a fortuitous twist. Mr. Law Yan Pak (Y.P. to his friends), a contemporary from Cambridge who had recently been appointed the first Inspector of Vernacular Schools in Hong Kong, called on my father unexpectedly and, on behalf of the Director of Education, invited him to fill the remaining position for another

Inspector of Vernacular Schools. The pay would be on the sterling scale, normally restricted to British expatriates – a mark of exceptional remuneration and prestige for Chinese civil servants in the British Colony. The offer, which could not have been more timely, was accepted with little hesitation.

Thus began sometime in 1917 or 1918, more by chance than by design, my father's lifelong career in education. By way of Oxford and the Hong Kong Government, he was now, to all intents and purposes, a *kuan*!

CHAPTER 6

The Inspector of Vernacular Schools

When my father joined the Education Department, there were three main categories of schools in Hong Kong: Government Schools, Grant-in-Aid Schools run under the banners of Catholic or Protestant missionaries, and Vernacular Schools. There was no free education at any level.

At both Government and Grant-in-Aid Schools, English was the prime medium of instruction, while Chinese was taught as a second language. Generally referred to as 'English' schools, they operated under the watchful eye of expatriate Inspectors of Schools. Senior students at 'English' schools had to participate in two levels of annual public examinations, the Junior Local Examinations (later renamed School Leaving Certificate Examinations) and the Hong Kong Matriculation Examinations. There were only about a dozen 'English' schools, virtually all having a reputation for consistently high academic standards.

In the case of Vernacular Schools, where emphasis was placed on the study of traditional subjects like Chinese classics and history, classes were conducted in Cantonese. English, on the other hand, received scant attention as a second language. 'Chinese' schools, as they were commonly called, greatly outnumbered 'English' schools. Run mostly by private enterprise, they received limited financial support from the government and came under less stringent regulation and inspection. In the absence of any public examination for their senior students, a common level of academic standards was lacking among Chinese schools.

The population of Hong Kong being predominantly Chinese, most parents naturally preferred to send their children to 'Chinese' schools to acquire proficiency in the native language and develop a good appreciation of Chinese culture. English was still widely perceived as just a foreign language, notwithstanding its international importance. However it was not uncommon for students from well-to-do families to switch to 'English' schools after completing their primary education at 'Chinese' schools with a view to learning more English and also obtaining a more balanced education.

Against this background, the appointment of Y.P. Law and my

father as the first two Inspectors of Vernacular Schools, both reporting directly to the expatriate Director of Education, must be regarded as a historic event. It was a clear signal of the Government's intention for the first time to provide Chinese schools with strong central direction and to raise their academic standards.

Y.P.'s interests were more oriented towards mathematics and science, while my father's strengths stemmed from his background, training and experience as a classical scholar. Between them they set and regulated academic standards and authorized school curricula and textbooks. Classical Chinese continued to take precedence over *pai-hua*, the written vernacular, as the cornerstone of learning. Both 'Chinese' schools and the Chinese departments of 'English' schools were subject to more rigorous inspection. Y.P. and my father were also responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress at the Normal School (a Chinese teachers' training college), which turned out graduates with diplomas for filling teaching posts at 'Chinese' schools and the Chinese departments of 'English' schools. In this regard Y.P. and my father made a point of interviewing all graduates individually at the time of their appointment as registered teachers.

In Y.P. and my father, the Director of Education could not have chosen two better qualified intellectuals with complementary assets and compatible temperaments. A highly popular and visible team, they were affectionately nicknamed 'Laurel and Hardy' in Chinese circles because of the contrast in their physical appearance. Law Yan Pak and Yu Wan were household names in Hong Kong.

As the population in Hong Kong increased and the number of schools multiplied, so did the Inspector's job grow in scope and complexity. Two more Inspectors of Vernacular Schools were appointed. Several new positions were also established for sub-inspectors; one of the new recruits was Lam Pak Chung, my mother's younger brother, who with his scholarly family background did not fail to measure up to expectations.

Y.P. and my father also served in rotation as Chairman of the Board of Examiners for British Cadets working in the Hong Kong Government and learning oral Cantonese and written Chinese. Over the years, quite a few of those Cadets went on to scale the heights in the British Colonial Service, either in Hong Kong or elsewhere in the British Empire. Among the best known of former Hong Kong Cadets who had met my father at Chinese examinations were Sir Alexander Grantham and Sir David Trench, both of whom became famous in turn as postwar Governors of Hong Kong.

After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Mr. Arthur St. G. Walton, the first postwar Director of Education, inherited the

unenviable task of starting the Education Department again from the state of desolation to which the Japanese had reduced Hong Kong. It was with a great sense of relief that he welcomed Y.P. and my father back to their old posts at the Education Department.

Mr. Walton wrote from England in January 1991:

Your father and Y.P. were an immense help to me – a Godsend you might say – and enabled me to concentrate my attentions on the problems of starting the Government and grant-in-aid ‘English’ schools, as I knew that the subsidized and private ‘Chinese’ schools could not have been in better hands.

My father was one of the very few Chinese scholars of his generation to have been enriched by Oxford. In the course of a career spanning more than three decades, he was respected and admired as both a man of principle and integrity and a charming and affable leader. In conjunction with Y.P., he shaped the course of Chinese education in Hong Kong, encouraged the development of a new breed of teachers, fostered pride in both the teaching and learning of the national language, and contributed significantly to the preservation of Chinese culture within an overwhelmingly colonial and commercial environment.

CHAPTER 7

My Mother

Between 1918 and 1924, my mother gave birth at yearly intervals to seven more children, four girls and three boys. Two of the girls died in infancy. The five who grew up together were Hung Kwan, Man Sang, Ping Tsung, Shuk Siu and myself Kwai Ko, better known in later life as Josephine, Margaret, P.T., Patrick and Brian. In 1929 and 1931 (when my mother was forty-one), two more daughters arrived, Wing Nin and Kwun Ming, alias Winnie and Rosalind.

Like all women in her male-dominated society, my mother was from birth constrained by custom and circumscribed by tradition. For instance, she never went to school, and was only allowed very limited formal education at home, for the simple reason that ignorance on the part of women was regarded as a time-honoured recipe for virtue. On the other hand, since upper-class women were ruled to be above manual work, she was given little opportunity of acquainting herself with domestic chores and was therefore rarely seen sewing, cooking or grocery shopping.

But most significantly, she was brought up in no uncertain manner to suppress her individuality and to abide by rigidly-defined codes of conduct, which blatantly affirmed the subordinate, and indeed subservient, role of women. Thus, she was groomed to be 'in speech modest, in appearance presentable, in conduct decorous, in application diligent', and indoctrinated 'as maiden to obey her father, as wife to obey her husband, as widow to obey her sons'.

Nevertheless, behind my mother's mask of timeless convention breathed a remarkable woman. She was gentle and warm-hearted, affable and sociable, forthright and ingenuous. Frugal and unostentatious by disposition, she was content with what she had, and not envious of what others possessed. She did not take the good things in life for granted, but considered it a matter of great importance to count her blessings by way of ancestor worship. Handicapped by lack of schooling, she relied on common sense and intuition in bringing up her children, running the household with its many servants and, most important of all, coping with change.

As a consequence of frequent maternity, my mother suffered from agonizing attacks of neuralgia over a period of many years

before Pearl Harbour. But she learnt to carry her cross with resignation and fortitude. During the attack on Hong Kong and in the cruel years that followed, she remained unwaveringly strong and courageous in the face of danger and hardship. When my father's health began to fail after the war, she devoted all her time and energy to nursing him and keeping him company.

My mother could not speak a word of English or find England or China on a map. But she cared so much for her children and had such faith in my father's judgement that she gladly accepted the endless personal sacrifices he kept asking her to make, for the sake of their education. And year after year, whenever the children did well at school or university, her days would be filled with joy and pride and she would feel abundantly rewarded. She clearly belongs to that élite circle of dedicated, selfless women who give much of themselves to their husbands and children and ask for little or nothing in return.

CHAPTER 8

The House on Shelley Street

With the fast-growing family, my parents changed residence three times during the 1920s, first to Arbuthnot Road (where I was born in 1924), then Coronation Terrace, and finally Shelley Street – all located in mid-level Hong Kong. It would be meaningful for me to sketch a mental picture of our house on Shelley Street, where for so many years the lives of so many of us were so closely intertwined.

Mount Victoria, 550 metres high, is the dominant landmark on the Island of Hong Kong. Looking north towards the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories, it commands a panoramic view of the beautiful harbour from end to end. Not far above the harbour, Caine Road snakes its way horizontally for about two kilometres across the northern slope. From about the mid-point of Caine Road, Shelley Street rises at a steep incline for perhaps a hundred and fifty metres to link up with Mosque Street.

Shelley Street lay at the heart of what used to be a quiet, peaceful middle-class neighbourhood before the Second World War. A grey mosque with its characteristic green-and-white minaret stood near the junction of Mosque Street and Shelley Street, brooding over the otherwise exclusively residential area. Built in 1915 beside a vegetable garden and within a large compound, this sombre place of worship was protected against intrusion by a high fieldstone retaining wall hugging the east side of the upper half of Shelley Street. Directly facing the wall, an unbroken row of narrow, nondescript three-storey houses descended along the west side of the street. However, the last two houses, numbered 17 and 15, near the halfway mark between Mosque Street and Caine Road, were conspicuous by their size and style of architecture. They were adjoining twin brick houses with a good frontage, two storeys high, functioning as one and separated only by the common dividing wall.

That was where we lived from 1928 till the early postwar period, except for a little over three years during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. My father chose this for his home primarily for convenience in his children's schooling. Two highly-regarded Catholic schools were within easy walking distance, namely, the Italian Convent (later renamed Sacred Heart School) and Wah Yan College, run by Irish Jesuits.

Imagine yourself getting out of your car at Caine Road and walking slowly up the steep slope of Shelley Street, which is not accessible to traffic. As our house comes into view, the first thing that catches your eye is a long L-shaped covered verandah, with white ornate lattice and railing, which wraps around the upper floor of the building. The long side of the verandah overhangs the sidewalk in front of the house along Shelley Street and the short side is directly above an alley running westward at right angle to the street. At the rear of the verandah there are as many as eight identical double doors with inset windows, all painted white and evenly spaced. Each double door is flanked on either side by maroon-coloured wooden shutters. Seasonal flowers blooming out of jade green vessels, neatly arrayed on top of the verandah railing, lend a touch of colour and character to the setting.

Two sliding double wrought-iron gates bar the entrance to the house from the sidewalk. The one at no. 17 is permanently locked, while the other at no. 15 handles traffic. Behind each gate and set back into the house is a small square covered porch, on the granite floor of which two ceramic elephants, each laden with a pot of flowers, stand guard with a nonchalant expression in front of a double wooden door.

Passing through the door at no. 15, you will find yourself in a corridor which extends about thirty feet along the dividing wall towards the far end of the building, where there is a staircase. The corridor opens on the right into a sitting-room with a piano, and then a connecting bedroom at the back. Two fairly large portraits, one of my grandfather and one of his 'replacement' wife, both in 19th century costumes, hang on a wall in the sitting-room. Upstairs, directly above these rooms, are two adjoining bedrooms.

Symmetrically, on the other side of the dividing wall at no. 17, a corridor looking towards a staircase leads to the children's study on the left and an attached bedroom behind it. An archway in the dividing wall facilitates traffic across the landing at the bottom of the two staircases.

Any one stepping into the study for the first time cannot possibly mistake its *raison d'être*. Lining the two opposite walls of this room, from end to end, are two tiers of large mahogany bookcases with glass doors. They contain perhaps a thousand ancient Chinese volumes, the age of which is evident in the traditional style of the soft bindings and the unusual texture and faded colour of the pages. Three wooden desks with chairs are arranged side by side in front of the bookcases at one end. There is at the centre of the room and directly under a ceiling fan a glass-topped round table with four

matching chairs. Nearby stands a square open wooden bookcase, over three feet high, creaking and groaning every time it is swivelled on its base. It is full of my father's books from Oxford.

My father's own study is located upstairs above the children's study and linked at the back with my parents' bedroom, which is furnished with two double-beds. The front half of the dividing wall on the upper floor has been removed. This provides ample space for a large combined sitting and dining room, where meals are taken, dinner parties are held and mah-jong is played. The kitchen and servants' quarters are set at the back of the lot, separated from the rest of the house by a large, partially-covered rectangular courtyard serving as an utility area.

As my thoughts ramble from room to room over the familiar old abode, how every nook and cranny seems to harbour a dormant memory! Three unique souvenirs in my father's study immediately come to mind. There stands on the wooden desk a photograph of Sir John Miles, looking every inch an English gentleman. Two finely-framed pictures hang on the wall behind the desk, one taken in my father's Merton rooms and the other being a group photograph of my father and his 1914 Merton contemporaries, before they went to war. To my father those photographs associated with his Oxford days must surely have been worth their weight in gold.

It was from this home that the children set forth one after another to pursue their studies overseas, Pak Chuen the eldest (better known as P.C.) in 1928, Sheung Woon in 1932, and the rest after the Second World War. Winnie and Rosalind, the two youngest, were born here and so was my nephew Anthony, P.C.'s only child and my father's dearest grandchild. My brothers and sisters and I grew up together by and large on very friendly terms, quarrels and fights being remarkably rare. There were even occasions when we shared minor misfortunes in inimitable style. Some of us, at one time, went down with measles in rapid relay and, at another time, suffered from whooping cough in discordant chorus.

Here, in the sitting-room at no. 15 was the piano my father bought for Sheung Woon in the late nineteen-twenties, after winning a minor sweepstake. I can well remember Sheung Woon dreamily strumming the *Merry Widow Waltz* and *Ramona*, Josephine earnestly playing *Rustle of Spring* and *Dream of Angels*, and Patrick playing, in a serious vein, *Meditation* and, in a light-hearted mood, *Ferryboat Serenade*. In the children's study, Margaret often wrote for hours at a stretch as a regular contributor to the *Rivulet*, a Catholic magazine, and other such journals. Upstairs, while having

his evening bath, P.T. often spun lively adventure yarns at my entreaty and for my enjoyment. On the verandah, Patrick and I, after seeing *Captain Blood*, zealously re-enacted, over and over again, the dazzling life-and-death duel between Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone. How Patrick won my heartfelt gratitude by agreeing to take turns to be the hero, even though he was much the taller and better swordsman!

Here, I played house in the bedrooms upstairs at number 15 with Winnie and Rosalind, complete with mock tent and toy utensils. Once in a while, I demonstrated my capacity for generosity and fairness by buying ice-cream, through the wrought-iron gate, from a passing vendor – a one-cent cone for Rosalind, a two-cent cone for Winnie and a three-cent cone for myself.

Here, a large, ancient pendulum clock hung on a wall in the sitting-dining room upstairs. With predictable frequency, like a character from Dickens, my father mounted a stool, raised his head and then, with the key in his outstretched right hand, wound the clock – slowly, deliberately and audibly.

Here, in a gentle, kindly and sheltered environment, I was brought up in a scholarly, close-knit family. Like many Chinese children, I had to learn and commit to memory eight household words that capture the essence of Confucian values, namely, '*filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, honour, integrity, a sense of shame*', even though I was too young at first to fully understand or appreciate what they meant. My daily domestic life was carefree, in that all my needs were anticipated and met by servants. Weekends and holidays were often brightened by joyous family events. Mine was a happy and contented childhood and adolescence. Unlike David Copperfield or Jane Eyre, I never knew neglect or want, but always felt secure and loved.

My parents finally moved away from Shelley Street in the early 1950s. Since then, a virtually unending housing boom has been constantly changing the face of Hong Kong. In September 1991, for the first time in many, many years, I returned to Mosque Street, now subject to one-way traffic, and looked nostalgically down Shelley Street towards Caine Road. Standing at the intersection I once knew so well, I could hardly find my bearings.

The entire neighbourhood seemed like a noisy little concrete jungle. A newly-completed forty-storey condominium, obviously designed with little regard for beauty or style, towered above the surroundings. There were buildings under construction and old houses under demolition. There was not a trace of our former home.

But dust and dirt and debris were everywhere in evidence. Gone completely from the scene was the leisurely and unpretentious charm of a bygone era. Nevertheless, behind the ageless retaining wall, the old mosque was still standing and still brooding, oblivious of time and indifferent to change.

CHAPTER 9

Childhood Memories, 1930s

It is with a distinct sense of fun that I recall the bee in my mother's bonnet concerning matters of health. Nothing could shake her conviction that indigestion brought on by gluttony was the root cause of most of her children's ailments. Hence, the standard treatment for any sick child, almost regardless of condition, usually began with a strong dose of castor oil, followed by a starvation diet of simple broth or plain bread. But it would be foolhardy for any one to cast doubt on my mother's approach. After all, none of her nine children ever failed to recover from illness at Shelley Street.

Sometimes, during my illness or convalescence, my father would sneak home quietly, like a secret agent on a covert mission, with a garoupa steak and boiled potatoes, neatly packed in a carton, as a reward for my alleged good behaviour. He always bought them at the Hong Kong Fish Company at Des Voeux Road Central, on his way home from work. Even though it was a thinly disguised attempt to sabotage her starvation programme, my mother would be game enough to turn a blind eye, as long as the villain of the piece was my father. To this day, steamed garoupa with boiled potatoes, plain though it may be, has remained one of my favourite dishes.

I have another wonderful memory of my father, one which I especially cherish. On many occasions when I was ill, he carried me to his bedroom in the evening, put me beside him in his double-bed, and then lulled me to sleep by chanting softly, almost in a whisper, well-known romantic poems from the Tang Dynasty (618-906). More often than not, he began with *The Lutanist's Lament*, the melancholy tale of a lonely woman who played the lute for a living while pining for her callous lover. Whenever I fondly recall those precious moments, I still seem to hear the gentle, haunting cadence of his voice floating back to me across the years!

My elder brothers P. T. and Patrick shared with me the front bedroom on the upper floor of 15 Shelley Street. For many years we slept side by side on three single beds. There I woke up one Sunday morning in a very bad mood. When my mother appeared to make routine inquiries, I behaved like a thoroughly spoilt child by screaming at her. With a click, the bedroom door swung open. The corpulent figure of my father, looking dishevelled in pyjamas and

with hair still uncombed, slowly emerged through the doorway, like a giant stalking his prey. Instantly I froze. For just a few moments, which seemed to me an eternity, he stared at me more in sorrow than in anger. Then with rare emotion in his voice, he thundered:

‘Who has dared to be so rude to mother!’

Overcome all at once by remorse, shame and fear, I stood trembling from head to foot, lost control of my bladder and wet my pants.

During the early 1930s, my father used to take five of us, Josephine, Margaret, P.T., Patrick and myself, out to lunch on a Sunday or a public holiday, at least once a month. Our favourite restaurant was the Prince’s Cafe, located in the alley beside the China Building at Queen’s Road Central. Seldom did my mother go with us, preferring usually to stay at home with Winnie and Rosalind. It made me very happy to be part of this popular family event, especially to be seen wearing a western-style suit in public and demonstrating my dexterity in handling knife and fork.

After lunch my father would sometimes take us to a soccer match at Caroline Hill or Causeway Bay, where we used to cheer lustily for our team, South China A. Sometimes we would go to a movie either at the Queen’s or King’s Theatre, both in the vicinity of the Prince’s Cafe. Although I did not know enough English to follow the dialogue meaningfully, yet I distinctly remember seeing Greta Garbo in *Mata Hari* and *Queen Christina*, Wallace Beery in *Treasure Island* and *Viva Villa*, Charles Laughton in *The Private Lives of Henry the Eighth* and *Les Misérables*, Norma Shearer and Frederick March in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, and Robert Donat in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Decidedly, the best actors in the world, in my unbiased opinion at the time, were Laurel and Hardy. Sometimes my father elected to spend the rest of the afternoon playing bridge or mah-jong at the Chinese Merchants’ Club, in which case he would send us home in a taxi with Josephine as leader.

There are other things I can think of which my father obviously enjoyed doing for the children’s benefit. Even though he was not a swimmer, he took us to the Chinese Swimming Club at North Point. That was where we all learnt to swim, while he and my mother stayed afloat playfully nearby by holding on to inflated rubber rings. As a result, swimming quickly became a popular family pastime in the summer months. However, despite my father’s best intentions, I never became a good swimmer. About once a year, a fair would usually be held for public entertainment on a vacant lot of land opposite The Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon. There, with my father

looking on smilingly, we would be treated to rides in the Ferris wheel and in tiny electric carts. And whenever the circus came to Hong Kong, the whole family would be among the enthusiastic and noisy spectators.

My father always dressed neatly and meticulously. If there was one thing that he would not put up with concerning his sons, it would have been an untidy, sloppy appearance. In fact he saw to it that unlike most other Chinese boys, P.T., Patrick and I wore mainly made-to-measure western-style clothing and imported English shoes, all procured from Tak Cheong Tailors right opposite the Queen's Theatre. We could well have been the best-dressed boys in Hong Kong. There is on display on the built-in shelf in my family room today a photograph of the three of us boys taken at the Botanic Gardens, each wearing tie, jacket and plus fours and holding a felt hat or cap at his side. Despite the somewhat blurred print, I can still be seen stealing the spotlight from my two handsome brothers, by virtue of my broad and eager smile. All my upper front teeth are missing.

My mother was punctilious in observing traditional festivals in the course of the lunar calendar year, especially Chinese New Year's Day; the seventh day of the seventh moon, in commemoration of two legendary star-crossed lovers, known as the herdsman and the spinster; the Mid-Autumn or Moon Festival, which falls on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon, comparable to Thanksgiving Day at harvest time; and the Chung Yang Festival on the ninth day of the ninth moon, a day for remembering the dead.

Chinese New Year's Day was by far the most important and colourful festival. It was a day earmarked for both honouring one's parents and practising ancestor worship. On that day, at my mother's appointed time, my parents sat side by side on two easy chairs in my father's study. The children, dressed in their Sunday best, lined up ceremoniously in front of them in descending order of age. One by one we kowtowed, first to my father, and then to my mother, while loudly offering them New Year greetings. This filial gesture was always acknowledged by my parents with a smile and a word of appreciation, while my mother handed each child two small red envelopes, each containing a sparkling silver dollar. As a matter of fact, exactly the same ceremony was performed on my parents' birthdays.

The end of this ceremony was closely followed by the beginning of another, namely, ancestor worship, a simple, traditional act of thanksgiving to one's ancestors for blessings reaped by the family. A

small room at the back of our house had been set aside, as a sort of private chapel, for this purpose. The main piece of furniture in the room was a plain mahogany altar placed against a wall. At the centre of the altar there stood a solemn-looking tablet framed in black, within which was the Chinese inscription, written by my father in bold characters on red paper, 'The Ancestors of the Yu Family Through All Generations.'

As the whole family trooped into the room for worship, red candles and joss sticks standing in pewter urns on either side of the tablet were lit by servants in attendance. Several dishes of freshly-cooked food, usually including roast pork, were laid out on a table in front of the altar. My father being less than keen on perpetuating ancestor worship, perhaps as a result of Oxford, and my mother being tactful, he was asked to begin the ceremony by simply bowing before the tablet. Then my mother took her turn by kowtowing solemnly until her forehead touched the ground. The children followed suit, again in descending order of age, but all the time under my mother's keen surveillance. No one could have got away with only a half-hearted attempt at worship!

One day after the Second World War, my mother surprised the whole family by proclaiming aloud that a simple bow instead of a complete kowtow would, henceforth, be quite acceptable during ancestor worship. When the children responded with a chorus of approval, my mother grinned contentedly with an air of triumph and benevolence, like a benign pope condescending to modify ceremonial aspects of worship, but steering clear of amendments to dogma.

My father always walked to work in the morning, that being his only form of exercise. It took him less than half an hour to get to the office at the Fire Brigade Building, right by the waterfront, going downhill most of the way. For the return trip, he would invariably take a sedan chair carried on the shoulders by the same two tough porters, who were brothers. My father weighing some two hundred pounds, it could not have been an easy task carrying him uphill to Shelley Street. But he was welcomed by the porters as a regular daily customer with a generous tip. Before the Second World War, the sedan was a popular mode of transport in mid-level Hong Kong, which had limited accessibility to motor traffic.

Sometimes some of us children would be waiting in the verandah for my father to come home in the late afternoon. At the familiar sight of the heavily-laden sedan crawling up Shelley Street, bouncing slightly up and down, we would scramble downstairs to be at the

front gate to greet him. On arrival alongside the house the two porters, sweating profusely, would stand perfectly still for two or three seconds to steady their balance before lowering the sedan gently on to the ground, by bending their knees simultaneously. My father would then clamber awkwardly out of the bamboo chair, like a huge lion emerging from a tiny cage, holding *The China Mail* in one hand and smiling and waving at us with obvious pleasure.

Mention of the two porters somehow brings to mind the Chung Yang Festival – the equivalent of All Souls' Day. My father's own mother was buried (while he was at Oxford) in a remote and isolated spot somewhere among the hills of Kowloon, behind the Lion Rock overlooking the Kaitak Airport. In conformity with conventional wisdom, my father's elder brother must have followed, to the letter, the professional advice of a *fung shui* expert concerning the choice of burial ground for my grandmother and the layout of her grave.

The mystique of *fung shui*, founded on the harmonious relationship between 'fung' (wind) and 'shui' (water), is the means by which everyday life can be adjusted to improve luck or avoid adversity. Compliance with *fung shui* over details of burial is, therefore, expected to bring luck and fortune to the descendants of the deceased, although, oddly enough, no one ever seems to care whether *fung shui* might also do some good for the loved ones who have gone to the other world.

The practice of *fung shui*, whether for burying the dead, choosing a home, or designing a building, is still very much in vogue among many Chinese, especially the rich in Hong Kong. Small wonder that Hong Kong has become so fabulously prosperous! It is even alleged in a local newspaper that some brokerage firm nowadays takes the precaution of consulting *fung shui* experts when forecasting trends in the Hang Seng Index. Be that as it may, there seems to be little doubt in the minds of believers that, one way or another, *fung shui* will continue to exert its bounteous influence on Hong Kong, now that it is part of Communist China, under 'one country two systems'.

Virtually every year at Chung Yang, a public holiday, my father would visit his mother's grave; during the early 1930s he would usually take P.T., Patrick and me with him. After crossing the harbour by the Star Ferry in the morning, we would take a bus to the Kowloon City terminal. There we would be met by the two porters bringing refreshments, including a roast suckling pig, and also items customarily used for burnt offerings, such as joss sticks and red candles. It would take us well over an hour to proceed on foot from the terminal to the grave. Despite the long walk in warm

October weather, my father would still be fully dressed in suit and tie! However, the three of us boys would be sporting shorts and cowboy hats, each proudly flaunting a toy six-shooter in a holster worn on a leather belt while jointly pretending to court imminent danger in hostile territory.

The excursion highlights of one sunny Chung Yang are still residing like pictures in the gallery of my memory. Under a cloudless, azure sky, we turned off the main road around noon and made our way leisurely through a little village I can no longer name, leaving the noise and bustle of Kowloon City gradually behind. Soon we were picking our steps along a zigzag, weather-beaten trail as we climbed a steep and rugged hill, which was practically deserted. Tall pine trees, dotted all over the slope, gave partial shade from the glare of the sun; every now and again, a breath of wind rustling among the branches overhead brought welcome relief from the humid heat. Leading the pack at a brisk pace were the porters, with the light but precious load mounted on their shoulders. Next came the three of us, romping along merrily and firing our guns at random at the imaginary enemy. Slowly, with measured steps, my father brought up the rear – a little out of breath, his tie loosened, his collar unbuttoned, his jacket dangling over one arm, his shirt wet through with sweat.

My grandmother's grave sat on a piece of land that had been carved out of the hillside. When we finally got there, not a soul was within sight or hearing so that we had the place all to ourselves. In front of the tombstone, the joss sticks were laid out and lit, with the food and soft drinks placed nearby. After slipping on his jacket and adjusting his collar and tie, my father stood still for a few moments, bowing his head in reverence; my brothers and I did likewise. Then came the signal from my father we boys had been waiting for: the attack on the roast pig could begin, with chopsticks, knife and fork, or bare fingers. In the excitement of the moment, my grandmother was quickly forgotten by her three hungry grandchildren. But it must have meant a great deal to my father to be at the scene, year after year, to honour the memory of his mother whom he had last seen prior to his historic journey overseas.

My mother was the moving spirit whenever parties were given at Shelley Street. It was such a treat watching her finalize the guest list with circumspection, choose the dinner menu with consideration, and dress stylishly for the occasion with deliberation. A chatty, cheerful and charming hostess, she knew how to look after her guests and make them feel at home. Sometimes the right

combination of guests would call for a game of mah-jong. At dinner she would take steps to ensure that her guests were courteously served and her children were on their best behaviour. My father usually assumed a passive role throughout the party, just relaxing and entering into quiet conversation with the guests. Thus, it was from my mother that the children acquired a taste for festivity and learnt the meaning of hospitality.

One particular family event we frequently looked forward to was a week-end or holiday visit from our favourite uncle Mr. Lam, my mother's younger brother, and a sub-inspector of 'Chinese' schools, and his wife and seven children. Many were the afternoons and evenings when our home resounded with loud and intermittent screams of joy and laughter from happy and compatible children playing together to their hearts' content.

After the war the Lams emigrated from Hong Kong one after another in different directions, to the United States, Canada and England. By chance I was reunited with some of them in Toronto in the 1970s, after a lapse of many years. My aunt and uncle passed away in turn at a ripe old age in Toronto, the former in her eighties and the latter in his nineties. It was with a real sense of personal loss that, in the presence of all my seven cousins, I delivered the eulogy in English at both funerals.

Speaking of mah-jong, I cannot resist the temptation to put down some thoughts on such an entertaining subject. This Chinese game for four is perhaps even more popular in Hong Kong today than before the Second World War. It is the favourite pastime of men and women, old and young. It appeals to both the rich and the poor, the learned and the less educated. It is played at home, at the back of small shops, in clubs, restaurants and luxury hotels. It is played at birthday and wedding parties and, indeed, on any happy occasion. More often than not, a party is assured of success if the trouble is taken to organize mah-jong games for the indulgence of guests. Not surprisingly, it is also played in Vancouver, Toronto and indeed anywhere on earth with a sizable Chinese community.

No one seems to know for certain when and by whom mah-jong was invented, or why mah-jong in Chinese signifies 'sparrow', which does not seem to be a very meaningful term. But the English word 'mah-jong' was coined and copyrighted by Joseph P. Babcock, an American resident of Shanghai who is credited with introducing the game to the west after the First World War.

Briefly, for the benefit of the uninitiated, mah-jong is played with 136 tiles, made nowadays of plastic; the pieces are named by five

categories, namely, bamboos, circles, characters, honours and winds. The first three are suits, each numbering from one to nine; honours are distinguished by three colours, red, green and white; and there are four winds, east, south, west and north.

The numerical breakdown of the tiles is as follows:

Bamboos:	1-9	4 of each	=	36
Circles:	1-9	4 of each	=	36
Characters:	1-9	4 of each	=	36
Honours:	3	4 of each	=	12
Winds:	4	4 of each	=	16
				<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">136</div>

The basic object of play is to obtain sets of tiles in various combinations. This is done by having a run or sequence of three tiles of the same suit in numerical order, and/or a sequence of three tiles of the same suit and rank, and/or three honours of the same colour, and/or three identical winds. The winner is the first player to show a complete hand, i.e. four sets and a pair of like tiles. There being no partners at mah-jong, each player operates entirely on his or her own.

The strategy of mah-jong is both offensive and defensive: to complete a winning hand as soon as possible, to block other players by not discarding tiles useful to them, and to build a high-scoring hand. There are many variations of the basic game, each with different sets of rules for achieving runs or sequences; the more complex and sophisticated the rules, the greater the probability of high scoring. As a game that thrives on chance without dispensing with the need for skill in anticipation and manipulation, mah-jong is indeed capable of titillating anyone with a gambler's instinct and challenging all who have a serious turn of mind. Hence, its immense popularity.

My brothers and sisters and I all learnt to play mah-jong when we were kids. I started playing the game when I was only five years old. I distinctly remember the occasion when I cried my eyes out after discarding a wrong card and losing five cents to my sister Margaret. At our Shelley Street home before the war, the clattering of mah-jong tiles during weekends and holidays usually meant that my mother and her children were basking in the fun and excitement of a family game. Sometimes Patrick and I were not above cheating our poor unsuspecting mother, by exchanging tiles under the table! In her old age, having a game with her children and their spouses

was my mother's way of melting her cares away.

Turning to another aspect of life at Shelley Street before the war, we rarely had fewer than seven maidservants to handle virtually any item of housework that one could think of. I was so spoilt that I even relied on servants just to fetch me a glass of water or to put on my socks for me while I was still in bed. It was customary for servants to work long hours, seven days a week. They had no annual vacation, although they were allowed to take time off on an ad hoc basis to return to their native village. Their average wage with an annual bonus amounted to ten or fifteen Hong Kong dollars per month, plus board and lodging. It was meagre but, by prevailing standards, not at all mean.

Although mainly illiterate, the servants were instinctively hardworking, honest and faithful, doggedly carrying out their multiple chores – some of them onerous – without losing their sense of self-respect. Had such wonderful and dependable domestic help not been readily available, my mother could not possibly have run her large household for so many years.

One of those servants deserves special mention. Ah Mah ('ah' is a common colloquial prefix before a name) came as my brother P.T.'s wet-nurse in April 1921 and remained with us until our departure for China in 1942. After the war she rejoined us, working for me when I got married and later for P.T. Finally retiring in 1969, she was provided for by P.T. until her death in 1981 at the age of one hundred. Sensible, caring and devoted, Ah Mah is reminiscent of Peggotty, David Copperfield's beloved nanny.

As a boy I used to take our servants for granted. It embarrasses me to recall that I was sometimes less than polite, if not downright rude, to some of them. How little did I appreciate what they were truly worth! Nowadays, whenever I watch reruns of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, some of the endearing and true-to-life characters portrayed in that heart-warming British television series – Mrs. Bridges the cook, Rose the lady's maid, Daisy the parlour maid, and Ruby the kitchen maid – remind me, time and again, of their worthy counterparts at Shelley Street.

CHAPTER 10

The Seeds of Learning, 1930s

It is clear as crystal that the manner in which my father moulded and motivated his children in Hong Kong bore the stamp of Oxford's influence, in sharp contrast to the way he himself had been raised in China.

As a pre-eminent leader in Chinese education, it was my father's responsibility to foster traditional learning among the student population in Hong Kong. But as a far-sighted parent buoyed by his own experience, it was his aim to bend his children's steps in the direction of more ambitious and more far-reaching goals. Over a period of some thirty years, the education and training of his children followed an intelligible, consistent pattern. They were trained at the outset to acquire fluency in two languages, Chinese and English, which have virtually nothing in common. Then they were encouraged, in their formative years, to enrich their minds and broaden their outlook by becoming conversant with the intrinsic values of both these two distinct cultures. Seen through my father's eyes, to cultivate a bicultural mentality is to seek the jewel in the bilingual crown.

Not surprisingly, my father sent all his children to 'English' schools, where the environment was far more conducive than 'Chinese' schools to the influence of Western culture. Eventually his five daughters matriculated at the Italian Convent (later Sacred Heart School), and his three younger sons spent all their school years at Wah Yan College under the Irish Jesuits. Neither Catholic nor Protestant by persuasion, my father was a liberal in his philosophical outlook. His decision to entrust the children's education to the Catholic missionaries was made, not out of religious considerations, but because of his high opinion of those two academic institutions. He certainly had a healthy respect for the Irish Jesuits as teachers. His choice of schools was fully justified in time by the children's academic achievements.

At home the children were given intense private tuition, in order to develop their language skills in Chinese and English and, to a lesser extent, their knowledge of French as a third language. Throughout the nineteen-thirties, hardly a weekday went by without some of the children taking private lessons after school hours. My

father must have spent a small fortune on their tuition fees alone.

Although my father did not know much about music, he was by no means insensible of its charms. It was not by chance that all his children were introduced, one after another, to the wonders of music as part of their upbringing. P.C. learnt to play the violin. All the others took piano lessons under Professor Harry Ore, a white Russian and the leading pianist in Hong Kong before the Second World War.

Taking a giant step away from tradition, my father was intent on giving his sons and daughters equal opportunities for education, and left little doubt in their minds that every one of them was expected to pursue academic excellence at both school and university. After dispatching his two eldest children to England, he reluctantly recognized that the best he could do for the many younger ones would be to send them to the University of Hong Kong. That nearly all of them eventually succeeded in furthering their education in either England or the United States, mainly on scholarships, was beyond his wildest dreams.

My father did his utmost to give his children the best possible education, regardless of the financial burden. He counselled them at each stage of their development, inspired them with his charming reminiscences of Oxford and England, and took great pride in their achievements. A gentleman in speech and demeanour, he was strictly governed by his deep sense of moral values and expected from his children what he always demanded of himself. In public or in private, not a breath of scandal was ever associated with his name. To my mother, he was a kind and caring husband who never allowed the gulf between his own education and hers to come between them; to his children, both a guiding light and a shining example.

When P.C., my eldest brother, joined the University of Hong Kong (founded in 1911) in 1927, my father had already decided to send him to England. With this in view my father engaged one of the English lecturers, Mr. Reeves, to teach P.C. specifically how to speak and behave like an English gentleman. Once a week P.C. was taken to lunch or tea at the Peninsula or the Hong Kong Hotel, both patronized in those days primarily by expatriates and, to a lesser extent, wealthy upper-class Chinese. There, he was drilled by Mr. Reeves in English conversation, taught manners and etiquette, and briefed on aspects of life in England. Thus, when P.C. set sail from Hong Kong, he was probably better prepared for England than most foreign students in his time, certainly far better than his own father some fifteen years earlier!

P.C. entered Pembroke College, Cambridge in 1928, read for the combined Law and History Tripos and graduated in 1931. Interestingly enough, his time at the University happens to overlap with the period that spawned the internationally-known quartet of Cambridge spies – Anthony Blunt, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby – who in later years rocked the British Establishment by turning traitors to their country. P.C. could well have run into some of those characters at one time or another, while having tea at the Copper Kettle or a pint of bitter at the Eagle or the Little Rose.

While still an undergraduate P.C., an unabashed admirer of Napoleon, set his heart on becoming a professional soldier with a view to fighting and winning battles for China. However, deferring to my father's wish that he should first qualify as a barrister before undergoing military training, he was called to the Bar in 1932. Then he went to Woolwich. In this connection, the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, wrote in January 1991:

Our record shows that Pak Chuen Yu was a Gentleman Cadet at the Royal Academy, Woolwich, from 5 February 1933 to 11 July 1934...There were 56 cadets in his batch, but he was not eligible for a place in the final order of merit as he was not joining the British Army. No details are recorded of his specialisation, though the course, designed to produce officers for the Royal Artillery, Engineers, and Signals, had a strong scientific and mathematical element.

As the eldest son, P.C. enjoyed a handsome allowance from my father and was thus able to live sumptuously in England. When in London he moved around habitually by taxi, rarely by bus or underground. His suits were tailored in Savile Row. He travelled often on the Continent. In the prime of his dancing days, he was hailed by his Hong Kong contemporaries as the 'Tango King'. However, to defray the mounting expenses resulting from P.C.'s prolonged stay in England, my father had to raise funds through a mortgage.

Sometime after his return to Hong Kong, P.C. joined General Yu Han Mou's Nationalist Seventh Army based in Guangzhou. That was when various warlords were gradually putting aside personal differences and rivalries and rallying behind Chiang Kai Shek, the leader of both the Nationalist Army and the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), in order to form a united front against impending Japanese

aggression.

On July 7, 1937 the Japanese engineered the notorious Loukouchiao (Marco Polo Bridge) Incident near Beijing as a pretext for the full-scale invasion of China. The outbreak of the undeclared Sino-Japanese War gave P.C. the opportunity he needed and he immediately saw action as commander of the solitary anti-aircraft battalion protecting Guangzhou. In the same year he married Norma Au, whom he had first met in England.

After matriculating with a distinction in History, Sheung Woon, the second child and my eldest sister, joined the University of Hong Kong in 1931. There were then very few women undergraduates at the University. She too went to England in the following year. But while studying at the Trinity College of Music, she fell in love with S. Y. Tong, P.C.'s close friend from Downing College, Cambridge. They got married in England and came back to Hong Kong in 1935.

Josephine and Margaret, the next two children, matriculated together in 1936, Josephine with a distinction in English, and Margaret in both English and French. Gifted with a fine ear for music, Josephine developed steadily into one of Professor Ore's best students; at a recital over Radio Hong Kong, she played Brahms' *Cradle Song*, to the delight of the whole family. At the University of Hong Kong, Josephine majored in Education while Margaret studied English and Chinese Language and Literature. Both were founding members of the French Club as well as active members of the Arts Association. Each year, prior to the commencement of the play staged annually by the Association, to which the public was invited, Josephine invariably performed at the piano. They graduated in 1940, at the time of Dunkirk.

Thus, for as long as I can remember, it was impressed on me in so many little ways that my eldest brother and three elder sisters all did well in their studies and that, by implication, I was expected to follow in their footsteps.

My earliest academic memory goes back to the day when I was formally initiated as a new 'scholar' in the traditional manner. Like my other elder brothers P.T. and Patrick, I never attended nursery school or kindergarten: my initiation, therefore, took on a special meaning. I was five years old at the time. I remember being meticulously dressed for the event in a bright yellow brocade gown, over which I wore a tight fitting black silk jacket buttoned up all the way at the front. I also put on a black skull cap with a red knob at the top. Ah Mah carried me on her back from one room to another, upstairs and downstairs, proudly mumbling incantations to invoke

good luck for her little master. Smiling and chuckling close by were my parents and the rest of the family. Finally the miniature odyssey ended in the children's study.

A wooden desk and chair, my parents' gifts to me for the occasion, served as the centre of attention. On the desk were neatly laid out a Chinese writing brush, a pot of black ink and a scribbling pad, all brand new. Easily discernible on the seat of the chair was a strange-looking object, somewhat circular in shape, thin in dimension and neatly wrapped in red paper. Inside the parcel was a pancake freshly made from glutinous rice! I was deposited on the chair and made to sit right on top of the pancake. My father, resplendent in a dark blue silk gown, sat down beside me, placed the Chinese brush in my tiny right hand and, holding my hand firmly in his, guided me to write my Chinese name, Yu Kwai Ko, on the pad.

With an encouraging smile my father asked me, 'Where are your books?'

Loudly and emphatically I responded with a well-rehearsed reply, 'In my belly!'

Thus, amidst cheers and applause from the happy gathering, I was officially ushered into the world of scholarship and learning. But to my juvenile mind, it seemed more like a domain of drudgery and perplexity, something to be viewed with suspicion and apprehension.

Needless to say, the pancake part of the act was meant to get me glued from the outset to scholarly habits. Anthony Trollope apparently had the same sort of idea in mind when he wrote in his autobiography:

I was once told that the surest aid to the writing of a book was a piece of cobbler's wax on my chair. I certainly believe in the cobbler's wax much more than inspiration.

Be that as it may, I must in retrospect challenge the validity of the pancake theory. I had a terribly shaky start as a little student. The pancake I had sat on in good faith and with high hopes evidently failed to generate anything approaching the desired results. However, others might equally argue that both my brothers P. T. and Patrick rapidly became outstanding students, after sitting on exactly the same kind of pancake at their initiation. Whatever the outcome of the debate, I remain absolutely convinced that the pancake treatment could be of little help to any child who happens to be a slowcoach like me.

The day after gaining recognition as a new scholar, I began

taking my first Chinese, English and arithmetic lessons at home from the same tutors teaching P.T. and Patrick. Two years later, my father sent all three of us to Wah Yan College, about a quarter of a mile away at Robinson Road, to commence formal schooling. Founded by Mr. Tsui Yan Sou in 1929, Wah Yan had by then passed into the hands of Irish Jesuits. I was placed in Class 8B, while P. T. and Patrick joined Class 7A.

At the time, the academic levels in 'English' schools like Wah Yan were graded from 8, the bottom class, to 1, the matriculation class; A, B, and C denoted the upper, middle and lower streams respectively at each level. There were no rules governing the entry age for students at any level.

I was then seven years old, but my classmates were by and large five or six years older, all having completed their primary Chinese schooling before joining Wah Yan. One of them, the oldest by far, was a married man in his mid-twenties! From then until I matriculated some seven years later, for better or for worse, I was never to experience the fun and pleasure of playing with classmates of my own age.

Vividly do I recollect my first day at Wah Yan. It was cold and I had to wear an overcoat. Ah Mah, the indispensable servant, escorted me to school and then handed me over to Mr. Chau, the class master. Mentally unprepared for this new kind of life, I crept shyly and nervously into the classroom, frightened at the sight of so many teenagers milling about noisily. When class began I sat uneasily and apprehensively at my desk, as if I were stranded on an alien planet. I saw antipathy in every face, sensed skulduggery in every smile, and detected animosity in every movement. When the school bell rang for the mid-morning break, I summoned enough courage to be the first to dash out of the classroom. Catching sight of Ah Mah in the courtyard, I rushed over to her, crying at the top of my voice. It was not an auspicious beginning for me at Wah Yan.

Mr. Chau, pock-marked and balding, was a strict disciplinarian who prided himself on exercising firm control over his class and would not hesitate to inflict corporal punishment with a ruler on any unruly or inattentive student. It is impossible to forget how my classmates and I were rigorously drilled to singsong this little rhyme after him, line by line, aloud and together, over and over again, placing equal emphasis on each syllable in a word as well as on each word itself:

GOOD BYE LIT TLE BIRD DIE
FLY TO THE SKY

加港文獻館

SING ING AN DAH SING ING
A MER RY GOOD BYE

Thus, with the best will in the world, we were taught to speak English, syllable by syllable, as if we were conversing more or less in Cantonese. In the words made famous by Rex Harrison in *My Fair Lady*, poor Mr. Chau and his entire class, like Eliza Doolittle, should by rights have been 'taken out and hung for the cold-blooded murder of the English tongue'.

It is worth pointing out that the many thousands of characters or words in the Chinese language are, without exception, monosyllabic. When spoken in Cantonese, a dialect with few diphthongs and little noticeable distinction between long and short vowels, the words tend to tumble out one by one in a staccato style of delivery. Furthermore, the pattern of Cantonese intonations is quite at odds with English inflection. That is why whenever English is spoken with a Cantonese accent, it sounds like strange monotones. Interestingly enough, Cantonese girls, for whatever reason, tend to speak English with a better accent and greater fluency than boys. Perhaps they have keener ears and a sharper tongue!

By and large, it is safe to say that the Cantonese, other than those who have benefited from having been abroad, are not famous for speaking English with a good accent. Unfortunately, they are notorious for speaking abominable Mandarin. There is a popular saying among northern Chinese, based undoubtedly on centuries of exasperating experience, which can be translated as follows:

In heaven and on earth,
 There is no more dreadful din
 Than that of the Cantonese
 Speaking Mandarin!

At the time I could read and write only simple Chinese and English, and my knowledge of arithmetic was very elementary. I was by no means ready for Class 8, which was roughly equivalent in level to today's Grade 6. As a result, the Chinese lessons that were meant for those who had been through primary school simply went over my head; the English Crown Reader had too many words I did not understand; and the exercises in multiplication and division were too difficult for me to follow. At the end of the academic year, I came out bottom of the class of forty, having failed dismally in most subjects. For a sensitive boy anxious to do well, it was a humiliating and baffling experience. Yet, despite my age and poor results, I was

promoted to 7B! To this day I still cannot quite figure out why I was not made to stay in Class 8 for another year.

Naturally, I continued to flounder, often struggling through tears over my homework. If my father was around, he would offer me help and encouragement. Sometimes he would even try to persuade me to skip the homework and go to bed instead. In those gruelling days, how I envied the apparent ease with which my elder sisters and brothers won their teachers' accolades or captured school prizes! It did nothing for my pride and self-confidence one day when I overheard two teachers talking to each other.

One said, 'P.T. and Patrick are indeed very talented brothers.'

The other replied, 'Of course they are. But I'm afraid their little brother is simply not in the same league.'

It was just my bad luck that I had to live under the shadow of two clever brothers. But I consoled myself with the thought that life would have been much worse if I had had to put up with two stupid ones.

Lacking the physique for sports, I was quite content to be a spectator. One day, while standing on a platform to watch a soccer game in progress, I lost my footing and fell headlong towards the playground below. My forehead hit a cement step and I started bleeding badly just above my left eye. An ambulance was called and, after the wound had been heavily bandaged, I was sent home, blood-stained and dazed. Rising from his sick bed, my father held me closely in his embrace and, to the surprise of everyone present, was unable to choke back his tears. The trace of a scar on my forehead still bears silent witness to that touching moment between a loving father and his youngest son.

Notwithstanding the accident, I continued to develop a keen interest in soccer. Eventually I was allowed to join P.T. and Patrick and their classmates in friendly games. However, my mother would always insist on our being chaperoned by Ah Mah, her duty being to stand on the sidelines during the game carrying towels and soft drinks. My mother would also stipulate, each time before we set off for the playing field, that we should 'avoid sweating too much'. Naturally, all three of us would murmur a hearty assent in her presence. But alas! while the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. How many times did we return home from a game, red-faced and soaking wet, embarrassed and contrite, wondering nervously what our poor betrayed mother would have to say!

At first most of the boys at school referred to us as the sons of Yu Wan, the well-known Inspector of Schools. Later we were tagged with the nicknames Big Fish, Middle Fish and Small Fish, the

Cantonese word for fish being pronounced in exactly the same way as our family name Yu. When Mr. Terry Sheridan, a popular Jesuit scholastic, staged *The Merchant of Venice* with my brothers' class, P.T. was cast as the Doge and Patrick as Portia. I was deliberately given the part of a little page so that the Three Fishes could be seen on the stage together. The tall, slim and gentle Portia, speaking in a well-toned voice and pleading with poise and eloquence for mercy, easily captured the heart of the audience. At the end of the play my father, brimming with pride, was surrounded by the Jesuits who made no attempt to hide their partiality for his sons. Amazingly, Patrick's portrayal of Portia happened to be an accurate portent of his future career as barrister.

My father took care to ensure that my brothers and I were getting the kind of private tuition we needed. From the many qualified teachers from the Normal School, he singled out Mr. Mak Kwun Chak for appointment as our Chinese tutor. Mr. Chow Ching Lam, our English tutor from Malaya, who had previously taught P.C. and all my elder sisters, certainly knew how to turn the routine learning of grammar into a stimulating exercise. At one time I also had a coach for mathematics. French was not taught at Wah Yan, but as we moved up to the senior classes, it was added to our weekly private lessons at home. Some thirty years later, when immigrating to Canada with my family, I was glad I knew a little French and thankful for my father's foresight.

It could not have been a better decision on my father's part to encourage Patrick to play the piano. Inspired by the magic of the keyboard, he grew into a wonderful pianist having a flair for playing light classics with a delicate touch and improvising dance music in the style of Charlie Kunz. At the other end of the scale, both P.T. and I got absolutely nowhere with our piano lessons. Fortunately, neither of us was immune to the charms of music. In our later life P.T. and I found ourselves sharing a common love of popular operarias. Indeed we both fell under the spell of the same woman – Maria Callas.

In our days together at Wah Yan, I looked upon both P.T. and Patrick as my role models, trusted leaders and closest friends and companions. Cast in the same happy mould, they were articulate, outgoing, well-mannered and self-confident. They competed year after year for honours in class. They were active in school debates. They were leaders at soccer. Best of all, neither of them bullied me!

True to form, both my brothers passed the Junior Local Examinations with Honours. However, during the Matriculation Examinations in the following year, Patrick became seriously ill with

blood poisoning sustained from a cut foot. For several days he hobbled with a high fever to and from the examination hall at King's College. Afterwards, believing that he had flunked the major papers, he confided despairingly to my father that he was about to bring shame and disgrace to the family. Curiously enough, the Board of Examiners entertained other ideas about Patrick. As it happened, both P.T. and Patrick were awarded Government Scholarships to the University of Hong Kong. My father was absolutely flabbergasted. It is hard to tell whether he ever trusted Patrick's word again!

Government Scholars before the war had no choice but to study for a degree in Education and to commit themselves to teaching at Government schools after graduation. With my father's backing, P.T. turned down the scholarship offer in order to read Economics. Patrick, on the other hand, settled for the Government Scholarship, thereby preparing himself for a teaching career.

P.T. and Patrick took up residence at Ricci Hall, a Catholic hostel for Hong Kong University male undergraduates. It was named after Matteo Ricci, the Italian founder of the Jesuit missions in China, who had died in Beijing in 1610 without realizing his dream of converting the Chinese Emperor to Christianity. With their good looks, light dancing steps and nice sense of humour, my two brothers were in great demand at social functions. They played together on both the Ricci Team that won the Inter-Hall Soccer Championship, and the Arts Team that won the Inter-Faculty Soccer Championship. Patrick also grabbed the Arts Association headlines by performing the title role in *Androcles and the Lion*. In September 1941 my brothers began their final year at the University with great expectations, but within three months the shock of war was to shatter their dreams.

During my difficult early years at Wah Yan, my father always made me feel he had every confidence in my ability to survive. Not once did he betray any sign of disappointment or disapproval over my consistently poor reports from school. Ever so slowly, the tide began to turn as I moved up to 6B and then 5B. By the time I was in 4A, I found myself able to compete with my classmates on many subjects. Fondness for the English language and European History and a growing desire for achievement were gradually eclipsing the fear of failure as my prime motivation for studying hard. But I continued to agonize over written Chinese, my weakest subject.

I am especially grateful to my father for my becoming genuinely interested at an early age in English and insatiably curious about

England. To whet my appetite for reading, he regularly bought me adventure novels, beginning with *Treasure Island*, *The Prisoner of Zenda* and many volumes of *Tarzan*. He encouraged me to make a daily habit of reading *The South China Morning Post*, *The China Mail*, and *The Sunday Herald*. Time and time again he drew my attention to the proper way of speaking English by stressing the finer points of accent and inflection which, strangely enough, were never given sufficient emphasis by any of my teachers. He spoke to me often and nostalgically about his Oxford days and what he admired so much in many of the Englishmen he had met. Sir John Miles' name frequently crept into his conversation. His overwhelming faith in Oxbridge as the world's noblest training ground for undergraduates was transparent and infectious. Thus, even as I was going through my formative years, the wish to go to England, to be educated at Oxford or Cambridge, and to learn to be a real gentleman like my father, a wish as yet vague and ill-defined, began acting like a magnet on the compass of my mind. But I also feared that it was but a pipedream that simply could not come true.

When I moved up to Class 3A, the opportunity to play a meaningful speaking part on the stage that I had been waiting for finally arrived. For the forthcoming annual prize-giving day, Mr. Sheridan was directing my class in a presentation of *The Escape*, an adaptation of the dramatic final chapters of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Wong Chin Wah, the top student, who was like an elder brother to me, was cast as the hero Sydney Carton. Being barely twelve, undersized and shy, I was the obvious choice for the role of the tragic young seamstress appearing at the end of the story, transformed by Father Sheridan into a boy aristocrat.

Having recently seen MGM's *A Tale of Two Cities*, starring Ronald Colman, the entire class – actors, extras, prompters and helpers – was inspired to meet the challenge. I can still recall, through the mist of time, the earnest efforts put into rehearsals by the enthusiastic cast, the sense of occasion and excitement shared by one and all as prize-giving day approached, the care and patience with which Father Thomas Ryan did the make-up for each actor prior to the performance, and the hush that fell on the overflow audience as the curtain rose for the first time that evening. Peeping from the side of the stage, I could see my father sitting right at the front. A bashful speaker lacking confidence and presence, I had worked hard on my pronunciation and diction throughout the rehearsals and I now wanted desperately to surprise my father with a fine performance.

Faithful to Dickens' plot, the play was based on Sydney Carton's

gallant and successful attempt at engineering the escape of Charles Darnay from prison in Paris, in the dark and turbulent days of the French Revolution, by sacrificing his own life.

In the final scene, the guillotine loomed tall and stark behind the prison wall at the back of the stage, its awesome knife-blade poised for the kill. Carton, masquerading as Darnay (whose aristocratic family name was Evremonde and whom he had drugged and dispatched to safety), was calmly waiting for his number – twenty-three – to be called and his turn to go to the guillotine. He was standing in a corner, lost in thought, when I made my entrance as a frightened, lone little aristocrat also awaiting execution.

An ugly crowd was pressing against the base of the guillotine and screaming,

‘Down, Evremonde! To the Guillotine, all aristocrats!’

I moved with hesitant steps over to Carton, believing he was Evremonde and anxious to obtain his support and sympathy. On discovering the mistaken identity and the nobility of his endeavour, I asked imploringly,

‘Oh, will you let me hold your brave hand, stranger?’

‘Yes, my poor child, to the very end’ was the reassuring, half-whispered reply.

When ‘twenty-two’, my number, was called I slowly released Carton’s hand and then sadly mounted the steps to the guillotine. The rolling of drums was loud but brief. Down came the knife-blade with a crashing thud that was partially drowned by a wild outburst of shouts and cheers from the back of the stage.

‘Twenty-three.’

Pausing at the base of the guillotine, Carton turned to face the audience and then delivered his immortal line:

‘It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest I go to than I have ever known.’

Indeed, Sydney Carton is still one of my favourite heroes, *A Tale of Two Cities* one of my favourite novels, and Dickens one of my favourite authors.

An extraordinary history lesson, which took place not long after *The Escape*, now cries out for recapitulation. It was a fine spring morning. Outside Wah Yan College all was quiet along Robinson Road, but for the chirping of birds and the occasional rumble of a passing vehicle. In Class 3A, located at the eastern end of the main school building, a bespectacled, young Jesuit scholastic – Mr. Fergus Cronin – was describing in fine style, with the help of a large wall map as well as the blackboard, the celebrated battle which took place on September 13, 1759 on the Plains of Abraham, near

Quebec City, and changed the course of history.

As I listened with undivided attention to the rousing tale, I was intoxicated with the drama of the tremendous event. All at once, my imagination caught fire: I was transported back in time to the actual scene of conflict as events began to unfold. I was tantalized at first by the costly, but unsuccessful, British attempts to penetrate the French defences along the north shore of the St. Lawrence. Then to the British came encouraging news of the chance discovery of an unguarded vantage point upriver, a little to the west of Quebec City. I held my breath as I watched Wolfe and his five thousand men scramble doggedly, in the darkness of night, almost three hundred feet up sheer cliffs to get over the top.

As dawn broke over the Plains of Abraham, I was overwhelmed by the thrilling clash of arms that quickly erupted. The rapid, well-drilled deployment of the Thin Red Line was met by the courageous, headlong charge of the hastily assembled French columns under Montcalm. In a matter of minutes, the disciplined, close-range volleys of the British infantry decided the outcome of the battle and, indeed, the fate of two empires. As Wolfe lay dying on the battlefield, Montcalm, also mortally wounded, was carried away by the remnants of his defeated army.

Just then the school bell rang. The sound and fury of battle faded. The lesson came to an end. Mr. Cronin rolled up his map and departed. But the Plains of Abraham lingered on and on in my heart and mind. Little did I dream that I would one day become much better acquainted with Canada than my learned Irish teacher.

When 3A broke up for the summer holidays, both Sheridan and Cronin had to return to Ireland to complete their Jesuit training. The cast of *The Escape* got together to give them a warm send-off. On that farewell occasion Sheridan, with his customary exuberance, burst into song with a lovely rendering of the Irish ballad, *Cockles and Mussels*. Not having much of a voice, Cronin had to be coaxed and coerced before finally crooning the simple melody, *Ten Green Bottles*; however, he cheated a little bit by starting with only three green bottles! So well remembered are the swansongs of the two young Jesuits who lent colour and substance to my personal development in what was for me a truly memorable year.

I was one of five in my class to pass the Junior Local Examinations with Honours in 1938. At thirteen I was still rather short and slight in frame. Beaming with pleasure but speaking not a word, my father made me sit on his lap and kept stroking my cheeks as a sure sign of approval and affection.

A few months later, at the beginning of my matriculation year,

the Japanese launched a major offensive in south China. Guangzhou fell in October. Refugees pouring across the Hong Kong border were accommodated in temporary camps set up at Fanling in the New Territories. On his own initiative, Father Donnelly took the Matriculation Class away from school for two weeks in order to participate in refugee relief work. My father, however, did not permit me to join the unusual venture, on the grounds that I was not old enough to engage in outdoor work meant only for adults.

The students' mission of mercy was noble, the experience was stirring, but the academic consequences for the class were disastrous – only thirteen out of forty managed to pass the matriculation examinations. Those were the worst results on record for Wah Yan. However, Wong Chin Wah, of Sydney Carton fame, was awarded a Government Scholarship, but he turned it down in order to study medicine. After the Second World War, Chin Wah became a successful high school teacher. Capitalizing on Sheridan's training, he also made a name for himself in Hong Kong as producer, director and lead singer in charity performances of traditional Cantonese opera, sung in English with an amateur cast. In May 1995, in his mid-seventies, he led the Wah Yan Dramatic Society to Toronto for a gala performance of *A Tale of Two Kingdoms*, at a fund-raising event in aid of the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto.

With two distinctions, in English and Religious Knowledge, I came first in my class, and fourth among all matriculation students. I also won a Government Scholarship. But my jubilation was short-lived. The University of Hong Kong would not accept me for the coming term in September because by then I would still be more than a year below the minimum entry age of sixteen. Consequently, the Education Department rescinded my scholarship. Disappointed, my father took me to see Mr. Ferguson, the University Registrar, and made a personal appeal for the ruling on age to be waived on my account, but in vain. Mr. Ferguson was not at all impressed by my father's arguments.

On the way home from the disheartening interview, we took the bus at the intersection of Bonham Road and Pokfulum Road right by the University campus. I got into the bus ahead of my father. As he was boarding, the bus suddenly took off and accelerated. He stumbled on the steps and was flung heavily on to the road. Immediately there were shouts and screams from the passengers. The bus braked to a screeching halt. The conductor and I ran over to my father as he lay motionless on the ground. He was breathing heavily from the stunning impact but, apart from cuts and bruises, was not too seriously hurt. Thank God, my father's earnest attempt

to get me into the University sooner did not end in tragedy.

During my matriculation year, I made a conscious decision to get secretly baptized into the Roman Catholic Church. It was the only time in my life when I did something of importance deliberately behind my father's back. At a later date he must have found this out, if only by my church-going habits and other behavioural traits, some of which were at best indiscreet and at worst stupid. But he displayed no resentment and raised no objections. The realization that I had been less than honest or candid with him did not dampen his love for me in any way. Few could have taught me a better lesson in understanding and tolerance. But, ironically, without realizing it at the time, I myself was fast becoming a rather bigoted and self-righteous teenage Catholic. I was even persuaded that it would be improper, if not sinful, for a Catholic to attend a wedding in a Protestant church!

To this day, my faith in God, a gift from the Jesuits, has given inner strength and meaning to my life. But for a long time, I have been questioning some of the teachings in Catholic dogma, teachings which I find difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with my conscience. I have been shocked by scandals within the Church, both past scandals which have come to my knowledge through reading and current scandals which keep surfacing in the news. But the clerical hierarchy seems unable or unwilling to acknowledge the dictates of conscience, and unconscionably slow and reluctant to recognize or deal with the individual failings of some of its members. To many of the informed faithful, this is hard to understand and harder to accept. A famous Catholic writer, Hilaire Belloc, once put his point of view across in this manner:

I believe the Catholic Church was divinely instituted, otherwise it would not last a fortnight because it's run by such a crowd of knaves.

In September 1939, at the outbreak of war in Europe, I returned to Wah Yan, at my father's request, for another attempt to win a Government Scholarship. It could hardly be described as an exhilarating experience. I was bored by some of the familiar lessons, while dreading the odds against a successful repeat performance at next year's matriculation. However, Father Ryan taught me English for the first time, and proved to be the most inspiring teacher I ever had. I was highly motivated to step up my reading and take greater pains over my writing. Father Cooney gave me generous help after

school hours by taking me assiduously through *Brush Up Your French* and giving me a better feel for the spoken language.

Barely a week before the Matriculation Examinations in 1940, a letter came from Mr. Ferguson out of the blue. I was informed that the University of Hong Kong was awarding me the King Edward VII Scholarship, normally intended for the top matriculation student of each year; in my case it was presumably meant to compensate me for the loss of the Government Scholarship on account of my age by giving ad hoc recognition to my achievement. Although less rich in monetary terms than a Government Scholarship, it carried greater prestige because of its rarity. Regardless, both my parents and I were dancing with joy at the marvellous turn of events.

So my days at my beloved school, the only one I ever attended, finally drew to a close. It gave my father cause for pride that the Three Fishes became triple stars in the Wah Yan firmament, jointly establishing an academic record which, as far as I am aware, has not been equalled in the school's history up to this day.

I joined the Arts Faculty of the University of Hong Kong, as a member of Ricci Hall, in September 1940 when the Battle of Britain was raging furiously over the skies of southern England. I was in the first term of the second year, majoring in Economics, when Hong Kong was attacked without warning. Falling between those two fateful events, the limited time I had at the University was neither promising nor satisfying.

In those days there were half a dozen halls of residence (hostels with dining and recreational facilities) for male undergraduates, but none for women. It was common practice for freshmen, or greenhorns as they were called, joining any hall to be subjected to ragging in virtually in any shape or form, with the tacit consent of the University. Two years earlier, P.T. had to make his way at the stroke of midnight through the Pokfulum Cemetery, trying to find a secret mark on a tombstone while fending off wild dogs; Patrick had to stand, wearing only pyjamas, right by the main exit at the King's Theatre so that he could clearly be seen, looking like a buffoon, by the people streaming out at the end of the evening performance.

Ragging at the University, fun though it was supposed to be, was anathema to me. It was totally contrary to my belief that, like my father at Oxford, undergraduates should be treated, and encouraged to behave, like gentlemen. Fortunately, for whatever reason, I myself was not victimized by any nasty or unpleasant individual ragging, but I did not escape an outlandish and, in retrospect, rather amusing group experience. We greenhorns were

lined up one evening in the dining room in Ricci and made to kneel and behave like a row of abject slaves in front of the ragging ringleaders, who kept hurling insults and obscenities at us. The climax of the farce was reached when the hair of each and every one of us was thoroughly smeared with a thick, dark, filthy mixture. It was apparent that, having been ragged themselves in their freshman year, the loud, obnoxious ringleaders were determined not to let us off too easily. 'Do unto others what others once did to you' seems to have been the motto for the ragging tradition at the University of Hong Kong before the war.

Quite the youngest greenhorn in my year, I did not have an easy time, to say the least, in making the awkward transition from schoolboy to undergraduate and trying to mix with young men and women who were mostly several years older and much more mature. I was diffident, self-conscious and unsure of myself in almost any situation, in class, in the students' union, and in Ricci. There were occasions when I made clumsy attempts, against my better judgement, to participate in the social life of the University, and more often than not I ended up feeling distinctly uncomfortable and out of place. On the academic side, I found it difficult working on my own, and sorely missed the familiar learning environment at Wah Yan, in which my intellectual development had been subject to close supervision by teachers.

At the end of the first year, which seemed an age, I was disappointed, but by no means surprised, when I failed to shine in any of my papers, including English and History, my supposedly strong subjects. As my second year began, Principles of Economics was added to the curriculum and became the focus of both my curiosity and attention. Unfortunately the lecturer from England chose time after time to dictate her lessons slowly, word for word, as if to little school children. What a dull and colourless introduction to what should have been a fascinating topic! As it happened, the outbreak of the Pacific War that cut short my early days as an undergraduate turned out, in the fullness of time, to be a real blessing, although effectively disguised.

To conclude this chapter, I must turn briefly to my younger sisters Winnie and Rosalind, with whom I played often at Shelley Street and to whom I was deeply attached. Unable to help them with their homework, I remember trying at times to croon them to sleep without realizing that I was probably giving them nightmares. They were studying at Sacred Heart School, aged twelve and nine, when the first bombs fell on Hong Kong and devastated their innocent little world.

CHAPTER 11

The Fall of Hong Kong, December 1941

Although ominous dark clouds had for some time been gathering over the Pacific, life at Shelley Street went on at a gentle and predictable pace. Then the storm broke, abruptly ending the happy and tranquil days of the pre-war era.

My father was an avid reader of both English and Chinese newspapers. It was his unchanging morning routine to glance through *The South China Morning Post* and the three leading Chinese papers (*Kung Sheung*, *Sing Tao* and *Wah Kiu*) before breakfast. On his return from work at the end of the day, he would read *The China Mail*, the evening paper, before handing it to some of his children. As the world crisis deepened after the Munich Agreement in September 1938 (when Great Britain and France betrayed Czechoslovakia by allowing Hitler to annex the Sudetenland, in the vain hope of gaining 'peace for our time'), my father was indeed following events in Europe with ever closer attention. Every evening after dinner he would allow nothing to distract him from tuning into the BBC for world news, while relaxing with a cigarette and a cup of green tea in the comfort of an easy chair in his study.

It was around dinner time on September 3, 1939, two days after the German invasion of Poland. With many of us in attendance, my father was waiting with a sense of foreboding in front of the radio for a statement by the British Prime Minister. Then we heard Chamberlain announce in his reedy, croaking voice that Britain was already at war with Germany. It proved to be the first in a long train of world events that ultimately led to Hong Kong's demise. It is incredible how the long forgotten memory of that fateful evening in my father's study could have been brought back in sharp focus to my mind, on the spur of the moment, as if it were but yesterday!

France fell in June 1940 and Britain stood alone. In September the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan was signed in Berlin. This was followed in April 1941 by the conclusion of the Neutrality Pact between Japan and Russia. Two months later Hitler invaded Russia. At the end of July Japan completed the military

occupation of Indo-China. The United States, Britain and Holland swiftly retaliated by imposing drastic economic sanctions against Japan. By October the Germans were battering at the gates of Moscow.

Through all those anxious months, Hong Kong was manifestly preparing for war. But, against his better judgement, my father was still clinging to the hope that the British Colony would not be drawn directly into the world conflict. The immediate consequences of war for him and his family would simply be unthinkable. I am sure, however, that he was not alone in Hong Kong in either his wishful thinking or his predicament.

At the time the Hong Kong garrison amounted to four Regular Army battalions: 2nd Battalion Royal Scots, 1st Battalion the Middlesex Regiment, 5/7 Rajputs and 2/4 Punjabis. They were supported by the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps comprising local residents of many nationalities and from all walks of life, including staff and students from the University of Hong Kong.

Churchill had decided in January in 1941 against reinforcing Hong Kong in anticipation of a Japanese attack, 'to avoid frittering away limited resources on untenable positions'. But fate was to determine otherwise. In July of that year, Canadian-born Major-General Grasett, the General Officer Commanding in Hong Kong, was posted back to England. On arrival in London, he prevailed on the British Chiefs of Staff to consider the defence of Hong Kong in a new light. In the event, with Churchill's approval, it was hastily agreed between London and Ottawa to dispatch Canadian troops to Hong Kong, in great secrecy, by the first available transport.

On November 16, 1941, which happened to be my seventeenth birthday, two Canadian battalions, totalling 1975 men, under the command of Brigadier Lawson MC, landed in Hong Kong without any advance notice. They were the Royal Rifles of Canada from Quebec City and the Winnipeg Grenadiers. They had been chosen by the Canadian Government because they represented both the East and the West, the French and the English-speaking Canadians.

For the benefit of the local population, the event was trumpeted by the Hong Kong Government as evidence of Britain's determination to defend the Colony and accompanied by idle boasts that Hong Kong was being turned into an 'impregnable fortress'. But the unfortunate truth is that those Canadians had had no battle experience, having been engaged mainly in garrison duty in Newfoundland, Bermuda or Jamaica. Some of them had not even completed their basic military training prior to departure from Vancouver!

Deeply etched in my memory is my first glimpse one afternoon of the welcome reinforcements. Standing on the verandah at Ricci Hall, I watched with fascination while a long column of Canadian soldiers, in full battle gear, marched briskly in single file up Pokfulum Road. To me at the time, Canada meant no more than a vast country of the Great Lakes, with a small population, but plenty of wheat and snow, far, far away. By no stretch of the imagination could I have anticipated that I myself would one day be a Canadian citizen, writing in Toronto about the fall of Hong Kong!

At 8 a.m. on Monday, December 8, I was having breakfast in Ricci with other students when the calm of the morning was rudely broken by the wailing of air raid sirens. It seemed like another routine air raid precautions practice, unusual though it was for the time of day. But moments later, muffled explosions could be heard coming from a distance. Rushing onto the tennis court overlooking the western end of the harbour, we immediately caught sight of dense columns of black smoke billowing into the clear, blue sky somewhere over Kowloon. Others, who had been listening to the radio in the common-room, burst into our midst, shouting, 'The Japanese are bombing Kaitak Airfield!'

Immediately after the all-clear, P. T., Patrick and I walked home from Ricci, normal bus service having been suspended. There we learnt about the attack on Pearl Harbour, although the full extent of the disaster inflicted on the U.S. Navy would not be known for quite some time to come. All of us in the family were indeed traumatized by both the suddenness and the enormity of what had happened. That Hong Kong could not hold out indefinitely against a determined onslaught was beyond doubt. No one could tell what might happen during the battle that had already begun, but everyone feared the uncertain future that loomed ahead.

Caught with little cash in the bank, my father found himself in dire straits. He had many mouths to feed, including his wife and seven children, his daughter-in-law Norma and her son Anthony, and seven or eight servants. Fortunately, by a miraculous accident of timing, my mother had just sold a diamond ring for several thousand Hong Kong dollars and had kept the cash temporarily at home, thus saving the family from utter destitution in the terrible months that followed. Fearless and resolute, my mother emerged as a tower of strength as she took immediate steps to deal with the crisis, drawing on experience gained in her youth during periods of unrest in Guangzhou. Arrangements were quickly made for provisions and other basic necessities to be purchased immediately, in anticipation of a siege. Window-panes were pasted with strips of newspaper to

offer a measure of protection from splinters. Henceforth, meals would be curtailed.

The next day, lured by curiosity, my brothers and I stood recklessly on the rooftop in order to have a clear view of an air raid in progress. In the complete absence of any anti-aircraft fire, a squadron of Japanese planes circled and roared overhead, slowly and at will, looking for targets. Then in precise formation, they banked one after another, diving towards ships in the harbour and releasing their bombs. But as far as we could see, there were no direct hits.

To everyone's dismay, the fighting in the New Territories ended much sooner than expected. Moving rapidly across country and bypassing roadblocks, the seasoned Japanese infantry broke through the main British defensive line – nicknamed the Gin Drinkers' Line because it was flanked at one end by Gin Drinkers' Bay – within three days. On the nights of December 11 and 12, the defenders managed to withdraw in good order to Hong Kong Island without suffering further casualties.

To add to Hong Kong's woes, there came the stunning news that *HMS Prince of Wales*, Britain's latest and much-publicized battleship, and the battle-cruiser *HMS Repulse* – both of which had only arrived at Singapore on December 2 – had been sunk by Japanese bombers off the east coast of Malaya. In the gallant words and polished diction of the BBC, which I remember all too clearly, the two ill-fated warships 'went down with all their guns barking defiantly at the enemy'. Thus was extinguished, in a flash, any smouldering hope that the presence of the mighty *Prince of Wales* in Far Eastern waters might somehow bring succour to the beleaguered Colony.

On the morning of December 13 a launch flying a white flag of truce was seen approaching Hong Kong Island from Kowloon. A team of three Japanese officers came with the demand for immediate surrender under the threat of heavy and relentless bombardment. In a vain gesture of defiance, the ultimatum was summarily dismissed by the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young.

While the entire population waited in fear for the Japanese to make the next move, the Island came under daily bombing, shelling and mortaring. My father, afraid that our house might be unsafe, decided to seek sanctuary elsewhere for the whole family. We first spent a night with one of his two younger sisters, Mrs. Liang, who lived with her five children in a modern apartment at Robinson Road, opposite Wah Yan College, and who was kind enough to accommodate us. However, the space available there was too

limited. The next day my father accepted a generous offer from Mr. and Mrs. Tang Man Chiu, who were close friends of my brother P. C., to put us up in their large and stylish two-storey house, built high up on the hillside at Kennedy Road overlooking the eastern part of the harbour.

Under blackout that evening we slept on the floor on the upper level of the house. We could hear ceaseless mortaring and shelling. Suddenly, there came a deafening explosion, which rocked the building and savagely jolted me from my sleepy state of mind. Shattered glass and flying debris crashed all around us. My sister Josephine and I, who were lying side by side, clung to each other in silent fear, as if the world were about to come to an end. Amidst confusion and panic, a lone voice cried out in pain. A servant was wounded in the back by either shrapnel or glass splinters. Fortunately, she was the sole casualty.

By the first light of dawn, it looked as if a shell had exploded right by a corner of the building, miraculously missing a direct hit by a hair's breadth. As the stray shell could have been directed at the military hospital nearby, my father therefore decided not to stay another night in the house. After thanking Mr. And Mrs. Tang profusely for their kindness, he led his frightened and sleepless family trudging all the way back to Shelley Street. What a welcome sight was our own house, standing serene and unscathed in the midst of continuing bombardment! There was no place like home.

On the night of December 18, the Japanese stormed across the north-east corner of the harbour. Landing between North Point and Shauiwan in the face of scattered resistance, they rapidly pushed inland. The very next morning Brigadier Lawson was killed in a desperate attempt to break out from his isolated command post. In a rare act of chivalry by the Japanese, his body was wrapped in a blanket and buried in the battleground where he fell. Over the next few days there was confused and bitter fighting, mainly in the eastern half of the Island.

Most fortunately, the residential area around Shelley Street did not suffer a single direct hit. But we were cooped up inside the house, with all the windows and shutters closed and bolted if only to provide us with a false sense of security. At one stage it was announced by the Hong Kong Government that several Chinese infantry divisions under General Yu Han Mou, the Commander-in-Chief of the Seventh War Zone, were heading south towards Guangzhou to attack the Japanese from the rear. Our gut reaction was to dismiss the news as sheer propaganda, obviously intended to salvage rapidly sinking morale.

Sadly, Hong Kong surrendered on Christmas Day 1941, an event that could never be blotted out from my memory. By a remarkable congruence of dates, the loss of the Crown Colony came in the centenary year of its occupation by the British, and on the ninety-ninth anniversary of its formal cession by China to Britain.

I am at a loss to describe the state of mind we were in at the time. All I can say is that, although defeat had been fully expected, the finality of the surrender, when it was officially announced over Radio Hong Kong in the early afternoon, was utterly devastating. But, mercifully, Providence and the human instinct for survival gave us heart as we braced ourselves for a long, hard winter of despair.

In what was indeed a hopeless battle against overwhelming odds, the Hong Kong defenders were outnumbered, outgunned and outmanoeuvred by the battle-scarred Japanese 38th Division, which had three regiments, totalling nine battalions, under its command as well as complete control of the air and the sea.

During the fighting, the Japanese committed unspeakable atrocities: civilians were massacred, women including nurses were raped, doctors and the wounded in hospital murdered, and prisoners of war shot or bayoneted to death. It was retributive justice, but poor consolation for the victims and their families, that Lieutenant General Sakai, the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Forces that captured Hong Kong, was eventually sentenced to death at the War Trials, and executed in Nanjing.

In all, the allies suffered over 3,400 casualties, of which 2,113 were killed or missing, or died of wounds. It is worthy of note that the first Victoria Cross won by a Canadian in the Second World War was awarded posthumously to Sergeant-Major John Osborne of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, who died valiantly while leading a counter-attack on Mount Butler. Of the Canadians, 547 never returned home.

Five days before the last shot was fired in Hong Kong, Churchill had signalled the Governor: '...every day that you are able to maintain your resistance you and your men can win the lasting honour which we are sure will be your due.'

Subsequently, in his memoirs, *The Second World War*, Churchill wrote:

The Colony had fought a good fight. They had won indeed the 'lasting honour'.

I knew two of the local volunteers who were killed during the fighting. They were Mr. France, a lecturer at the University, and

Algernon Ho, a fellow Riccian, who was captured and bayoneted by the Japanese. It is only fitting that I should end this episode of my story with a tribute to their memory. They too had won the lasting honour.

Half a century later, on a clear morning in September 1991, I went to Sai Wan War Cemetery in Hong Kong for the very first time. Sai Wan Hill is at the eastern end of the Island. Perched on the brow of the hill, the Cemetery looks down upon a housing estate half-hidden in the valley below and towards the open sea.

Immediately beyond the entrance there rises a massive and imposing monument, on the face of which are inscribed in gold lettering the names of the fallen, including the Canadians, and the units to which they belonged.

Falling sharply away from the monument, towards a large Cross raised on a pedestal at the bottom of the steep slope, are row upon row of tombstones, meticulously aligned and neatly kept, some marked with a cross, some with a maple-leaf and a cross, a few bearing the mere inscription: An Unknown Soldier.

Sai Wan War Cemetery is a moving sight and a poignant legacy of eighteen violent and desperate days in the fascinating history of Hong Kong as a British Crown Colony, a history which, as the world knows, came to an end on June 30, 1997.

In memory of all those who gave their lives in the defence of Hong Kong – the British, the Canadians, the Indians, and the Volunteers – the following lines are taken, with a simple adaptation, from *In Flanders Fields*, written by John McCrae, a Canadian doctor-soldier, on the morning of May 3, 1915, at the height of the Second Battle of Ypres, during the First World War:

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved. And now we lie
In Sai Wan Hill.*

CHAPTER 12

The Perilous Years, 1942-45

1942

Unquestionably, the fall of Hong Kong marked the nadir of our fortunes. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, we were living under the constant shadows of fear and gloom, fear of the brutal enemy and gloom over the imponderable future. Yet a star of hope continued to glimmer on the distant horizon as we clung fervently to the belief that, come what might, the Allies were bound to win the war.

One of the first acts of the Japanese Military Government was to proclaim martial law, pending the return to more normal conditions. Consequently looters were shot at sight or beheaded on the spot. The people were also informed that if any Japanese soldier was seen forcing his way into a home, they should make every effort to attract the attention of the patrolling Military Police by banging their pots and pans aloud. As an immediate precaution, Josephine and Margaret went into hiding at Sacred Heart School. And for many anxious, eerie days and nights, we could hear the recurring sounds of concerted banging and clanging, sometimes coming from nearby, sometimes echoing from afar, often lasting a long time. Fortunately not once did we find ourselves coming face to face with the dreaded prowlers.

In those early days of the Japanese occupation, our servants rendered exceptional service by venturing out of the house in order to queue up for rice rations in the Central District, not far from Shelley Street, and procure what little food was available from hawkers. They came back with grim accounts of scenes of desolation and destruction.

As the days stretched ever so slowly into weeks, and the weeks into months, we were mired in inactivity, emptiness and boredom. I tried to occupy my mind as much as possible by reading all the novels I could find around the house. But there was simply too much time on our hands, time spent all too often on hankering after the past, worrying about the present and wondering when, if ever, there would be light at the end of the tunnel. The house was darkened throughout the day by keeping windows and shutters permanently closed in the hope of deterring undesirable elements,

and at night, being without electricity, it was dimly lit by candles and oil lamps. In such a dismal setting we fell into the habit of talking in hushed voices, as if afraid of being overheard, and, sad to relate, seemed to have lost the capacity for humour and laughter. On those infrequent occasions when we went out, we had to suffer the humiliation of bowing to Japanese sentries posted at key points or outside military establishments. What a bitter pill it was to swallow!

There was not enough to eat and for the first time we experienced real hunger. Although we must all have suffered from malnutrition, none of us was taken seriously ill during this woeful period. In the streets emaciated men, many with swollen feet, could be seen begging or dying where they crouched or lay. But I do not remember seeing any woman in such desperate straits out in the open. Is it possible that starving women simply preferred to die with dignity at home? One morning a man in rags was found stricken right in front of our house, mumbling incoherently and frothing at the mouth. In my youthful religious fervour I ran up to Wah Yan College and got hold of the first available Jesuit, Father Craig, to come and baptize the poor victim. It was my first direct encounter with the tragedy of death.

One unusual incident stands out in my memory. Early one afternoon a Japanese officer with a typical long sword dangling from his belt, and several soldiers clutching rifles with fixed bayonets made their presence known by rattling and shaking our gates and yelling for attention. We had no choice but to let them in. The officer barked a stream of orders in Japanese which had us baffled. After a short frightening impasse, we finally got the message. Everyone in the house was summoned to the sitting-room at number 15 and lined up facing the Japanese. Slowly and menacingly, the officer glared at each of us in turn. Then, with his eyes fixed on me, he made a low guttural sound as if to give an order. Instantly, a bayonet was pointed my way, and I was unceremoniously hustled out of the room while my family looked on in fear, not daring to move or say a word.

Taken upstairs, I was pushed into the room right by the landing, the bedroom shared by Winnie and Rosalind. With the help of sign language I was ordered to open wardrobes and drawers and flip over mattresses. While turning everything within sight upside down or inside out, I began to suspect that the Japanese were making a routine house-to-house search for hidden weapons.

For some time I went on ransacking one room after another. To show that I had nothing to hide, I carried out my none-too-difficult assignment patiently and methodically. Outwardly I feigned calm,

but inwardly I was a jumble of nerves. While the uncouth guards around me engaged in raucous chatter, I sought courage in silent prayers. At long last, the search through the entire house having been completed, I was led back to the sitting-room. After tossing more gibberish at us, the unwelcome intruders jangled with their weapons arrogantly out of the house. In a spontaneous outburst of magnanimity, I hastily forgave my enemies for denying me the opportunity of dying a heroic death.

It came as no surprise that the reception of short wave broadcasts was prohibited by the Japanese. Despite the threat of severe punishment, my father simply ignored the ban. Once or twice a day, we huddled closely around him in his study, with the door shut, as we listened surreptitiously to either the BBC or the Voice of America. We made absolutely certain that not a murmur could be heard beyond our tight circle of faces. In the past, it was customary for my father to discuss war news and major events with us almost every day. But now he was unusually silent and subdued, choosing instead to keep his own counsel and visibly bending under the weight of anxiety for the family under circumstances entirely beyond his control.

At first disastrous news came thick and fast from the various battlegrounds in South-East Asia, as the Allies were being crushed everywhere by the Japanese, at sea, on land, and in the air. On January 2, 1942, barely a week after Hong Kong's surrender, Manila was captured. Closely following the defeat of the British in Malaya, Singapore capitulated on February 15, much sooner than anyone, including Churchill, could have expected. A few days later the Japanese landed in Bali and Java. After desperate fighting, the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines was overrun on April 9. During the subsequent siege of Corregidor, the island fortress facing Bataan, the Voice of America began every single broadcast of war news, day and night, with the spirited battle-cry, 'Corregidor Still Stands!' But on May 6, Corregidor finally fell, while over in Burma, Mandalay was also abandoned. Indeed the lights were going out all over South-East Asia.

In the flush of unbroken triumph over the Allies, the Japanese were busy proclaiming in Hong Kong the establishment of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', on billboards, over the radio and in newspapers. Some sphere! Some prosperity! How very impudent they were in their blatant attempts to pull the wool over people's eyes!

But all was not lost. Suddenly, on April 18, American planes appeared literally out of the blue to bomb Tokyo for the very first

time. This was followed in May by the Battle of the Coral Sea, the outcome of which seemed far from clear or decisive. But we deduced, correctly as it turned out, that as the Japanese failed to announce any successful landing following the air and sea encounters, they must have suffered some kind of setback. Then came news in June of the Battle of Midway, which ended with both sides claiming victory. However, by identifying unequivocally all four of the Japanese aircraft carriers that had reportedly been sunk, the Voice of America succeeded in winning our vote of confidence. Sensing that the tide was beginning to turn in favour of the Allies, we even had the audacity to pose the question, 'Could this point to an earlier end to the war in the Pacific, despite Pearl Harbour?'

Closer to home, Hope beckoned us through the dark clouds, acting as a catalyst to precipitate change. The Nationalist Government in Chongqing, under Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek, repeatedly broadcast the offer of unconditional assistance to anyone reaching Free China from Hong Kong. Students would be able to continue their studies at any school or university at government expense. P.T. set the ball rolling by speaking out in favour of escape to the mainland. There was no denying that to remain and stagnate in Hong Kong would mean, sooner or later, starving to death, succumbing to disease or, worse still, being forced to work for the Japanese. None of the alternatives was palatable, tolerable or acceptable. It was a desperate time for desperate games to be played for desperate stakes. Although my parents were initially apprehensive of the risks involved in any attempt at escape, the force of P.T.'s arguments carried the day. Galvanized by the prospect, however uncertain, of breaking loose from the Japanese, the whole family sprang to life.

By an irony of fate, a foolproof escape plan was handed to us on a plate by the Japanese. Unable to supply Hong Kong with sufficient food and anxious to disperse the population, the Japanese Military Government decreed that anyone filling in a form and signing a commitment not to join the Chinese Nationalist Government would be allowed to depart. Did the Japanese really think that those applying for permission to leave Hong Kong at the time were taking such a commitment seriously? It hardly seemed possible that the mighty, well-oiled Japanese military machine could have been such a stickler for red tape!

At a family conference, it was unanimously agreed that P. T. and I should be the first to go into Free China as pathfinders, to be followed, if everything went well, by the rest of the family. On a windy, drizzly day in July, P.T. and I waved a tense goodbye to the

rest of the family as we boarded a crowded ferry for Macao to pursue our rendezvous with destiny, each equipped with a map and a mosquito net and fortified by a stout heart and unquenchable hopes. P.T. was my undisputed leader, in whom I had every confidence and with whom I was on the best of terms.

Situated on the Chinese coastline sixty-four kilometres to the west of Hong Kong, Macao was the first stepping-stone on our way to Free China. This little trading outpost was originally established by the Portuguese in 1557, but it was not until 1887 that it was formally recognized by China as Portuguese territory. After the fall of Hong Kong, Macao had come under Japanese control in all but name. We stayed overnight at Macao, where we visited our fourth grandmother (my grandfather's third concubine), whom we regarded with affection and respect.

The next day we took a boat to Leizhou Wan (Guangzhou Wan), a strategic bay tucked away on the east coast of Leizhou Bandao (Luichow Peninsula), at the south-west extremity of Guangdong Province, which had been leased to France in 1898 for ninety-nine years. At the time Leizhou Bandao was still under the control of Vichy France, but to all intents and purposes it had fallen within the Japanese 'co-prosperity sphere'. The voyage of some three hundred kilometres was stormy, and both P.T. and I became very sea-sick. After resting overnight in Chikan, a small town in Leizhou Wan, we stepped jauntily on a very hot and humid morning across the border into Free China, pausing briefly to greet the lone Chinese sentinel on duty and to salute the Chinese flag fluttering in the breeze. At last we were safe, on home ground and free from the clutches of the Japanese. To regain freedom after it had been lost was a unique experience that nothing could match.

Starting from that lonely outpost, we criss-crossed northward on foot into adjoining Guangxi Province, our destination being Guilin, its capital, some five hundred kilometres further inland. On at least one occasion the difficult terrain made it necessary for us to journey by sedan chair. At night we slept in the open, in dilapidated shelters or in ramshackle inns.

The names of the many towns and villages we passed through have gone clean out of my memory. But I do recall that in all those places, living conditions were primitive: there was little or no electricity, no running water, and no sewers. At one point we chugged along a river for two or three days in some kind of wooden boat, something like a cross between a tiny tramp steamer and an oversize junk, which had crude sleeping berths and a simple canteen. But I cannot possibly forget the evening in Liuzhou where we were

given a warm welcome by the city council. At the end of the formal dinner, easily our best meal in months, the mayor stood up smilingly to announce that it was his privilege to take his brave young guests on a conducted tour of the city's most glamorous landmark.

Soon we were escorted to a large, old, unkempt and dimly-lit bungalow. As we walked slowly along a long corridor which opened into an array of cubicles on either side, we came face to face with scantily-clad and slatternly women of every age and description, some standing, some sitting, all eagerly looking for clients. The quiet ones ogled us; the boisterous ones shouted obscene remarks; the aggressive ones tried to drag us into their dens. Were we surprised to find ourselves in the thick of things inside a brothel! We came away from the revolting sight with a sickening sense of disgust and pity, having learnt more about the seamy side of life in just a few minutes than in all our previous years.

The next morning we boarded a train for the last lap of our journey. Finally, two or three weeks after leaving Hong Kong, we reached Guilin and the end of what had indeed been a very exciting real-life adventure. I remember Guilin as a city ringed around by awesome giant limestone formations, rising precipitously here, there, and everywhere to meet the sky, and contrasting stunningly with the surrounding paddy-fields and meadows. No wonder that Guilin has traditionally been acclaimed for its scenery, reputedly 'the most striking in the Chinese Empire'. Interestingly, it came to light after the war that Guilin had served as a top-secret Allied outpost of the British Army Aid Group (BAAG).

P.T. immediately wrote to my father about our safe arrival, urging him to depart post-haste with the rest of the family, in case the Japanese should change their minds about allowing people to leave Hong Kong. Postal service was maintained between Free China and Hong Kong throughout the war. P.T. took care to disguise his message in subtle language for fear of censorship by the Japanese.

My sister Sheung Woon gave birth on July 14, 1942 to a daughter, called Margaret after her aunt, and nicknamed ever since the 'Bastille Day little lady'. On account of the young family, Sheung Woon and her husband decided against leaving for Free China. Instead, they moved to Macao where they remained until the end of the war. To help support the family, Sheung Woon gave English lessons to the Chinese mistresses of Japanese officers.

My parents arrived in Leizhou Wan sometime in August with Margaret, Winnie, Rosalind, Norma and Anthony. Josephine did not go with them, having decided to travel to Shanghai to join her close

friend from the University of Hong Kong, Lena So. Patrick therefore stayed behind in Hong Kong long enough to see her safely on board her ship, and to dispose of some family possessions in order to raise cash for my father. He caught up with the family in Chikan a little later. Josephine remained in Shanghai with the So family for the rest of the war.

'No pains, no gains' may sound like a tired truism. But my father's decision to get out of Hong Kong certainly paid huge and unexpected dividends. He was appointed by the British Government as Deputy to the Officer-in-Charge at the British Consulate Office in Shaoguan, the capital of Guangdong Province. The office was being established primarily to provide relief and assistance to Hong Kong civil servants and their families, now turning up in steadily growing numbers. Coincidentally P.C. arrived from Chongqing to collect Norma and Anthony.

In a flurry of activity, P.C. accompanied my father all the way to Shaoguan before returning for his family. Patrick proceeded to Guilin ahead of my mother and the two younger sisters to make temporary housing arrangements until my father was ready to receive them in Shaoguan. Margaret managed to find herself a teaching job in Chikan.

P.T., Patrick and I were happily reunited in Guilin, but not for long. P.T. left shortly afterwards for Shaoguan where he was soon recruited by Lieutenant General Lee Yin Woh, Head of the Political Department of the Seventh War Zone, to work under him as the first fully bilingual staff officer with the rank of major. In the meantime I had made up my mind to try my luck at Sun Yat Sen University (named after the Father of the Chinese Republic), formerly located in Guangzhou and now re-established in the vicinity of Pingshi Village. I had absolutely no idea what the wartime university was like, and Pingshi was but a tiny dot on the map right at the border between the provinces of Hunan and Guangdong, many hundreds of kilometres away from Guilin by rail. But to continue with my studies with a government subsidy was obviously the most sensible course of action for me to take.

Patrick accompanied me to the railway station at Guilin. We did not know what the future had in store for either of us, or when or where we might meet again. At the final whistle we embraced each other awkwardly, unable to find words to say goodbye. I clambered hurriedly onto the train with a small cardboard suitcase and a canvas bag stuffed with a blanket and some winter clothing, all the while trying to fight back the fear of being all alone, with very little money, in an unfamiliar, uncertain and unsafe world. As the train

slowly pulled away, I leaned out of the carriage window and saw Patrick running after it along the platform. For a few moments our eyes met. The love and anguish I saw on his face struck such a responsive chord in me that I could no longer contain my pent-up emotions. I broke down, weeping uncontrollably, while the train rattled and rumbled louder and louder in my ears. It was the saddest moment of my life. However, I would soon be eighteen. The time had come for me to live by my wits, to fend for myself and to start growing up on my own.

Sometime during the night I was one of a few passengers to get off the train at Pingshi. In pitch-darkness I groped my way anxiously towards a faint light in the distance. To my immense relief it turned out to be an inn, although a very primitive one indeed. There I spent a restless night.

Next morning I found out that Pingshi Village was still a good distance upstream. After making my way as directed to the river bank, I climbed into a long narrow boat, which resembled an enlarged Cambridge punt with a wicker canopy for protection against wind and rain. Accompanied by a handful of fellow-travellers, I was soon on my way.

Skirting at all times along the bank, the boat was propelled against the current by six strong men, three on each side, who punted methodically with long poles by using the combined force of their arms and shoulders. When navigating a long stretch of rapids, half the crew jumped ashore and dragged the boat forward with long, thick ropes tied around their backs and shoulders, while the other half remained on board punting with all their might. All of a sudden the entire crew broke into song, piercing the air with shrill drawn-out notes, as if to stiffen their resolve to conquer the hostile elements. Enchanted by the unusual sight and sound of their unremitting toil, I quietly joined the ensemble by humming to myself the *Song of the Volga Boatmen*.

Situated on the river bank, Pingshi had a single unpaved alley threading its way between low, antiquated wooden structures, a hotchpotch of untidy shops and dwellings. Outside the village there stretched a vast expanse of terraced paddy-fields, divided by narrow footpaths into small plots, like all paddy-fields I had seen elsewhere. Sun Yat Sen University, I learnt, was located not in Pingshi itself but on the opposite side of the river, several kilometres further inland. Life in such a remote region must have gone on in much the same way for the past several hundred years or more. Many of the inhabitants, mostly peasants, were probably unconcerned, if not unaware, that the country was engaged in an all-out war with a

mortal enemy.

At Pingshi, I ran into three of my former classmates from the University of Hong Kong, Louis Yung and two brave and amiable sisters, Lillian and Anita Ip, who were among many waiting for the opening of term, still two or three weeks away. Being short of funds, we decided to stay together in a rented hut built on a mud foundation, which was barely large enough for two separate beds, each made up of wooden planks placed on top of benches. There we cohabited, in a manner of speaking, Yung and I becoming strange bedfellows in one corner and the sisters sharing the other bed. Life was delightfully unspoilt by modern amenities: every morning, in fair weather or foul, I picked my way gingerly, wearing clogs, down a slippery, muddy slope to the river's edge, stepped onto floating logs, and then washed my face and brushed my teeth while trying to avoid falling into the river!

At some point Patrick paid me a visit at Pingshi. This being a natural occasion for recalling happier times, Patrick and I – the tenor and the baritone – sang our favourite duets, *Indian Love Call*, *O Sole Mio* and *Home Sweet Home*, as we had often done at Shelley Street. Our vocal performance, however flawed, could not have failed to impress the Ip sisters, if only because Lillian was tone deaf and Anita not at all musically discriminating.

At the opening of term, we all moved over to the Sun Yat Sun University campus, where I met other former classmates from the University of Hong Kong, including Elizabeth Liang, my first cousin, and her boyfriend Chin Hon Ngi. As it happened, the two young lovers were happily married at the end of the war. Fifty years later, I had the rare pleasure of proposing the toast, in a well-written and well-rehearsed speech, to Elizabeth and Chin at their golden wedding anniversary in Toronto. However, there was a snag. The din in the crowded restaurant was such that hardly anyone at the large party could hear a word of what I was trying to say!

At Sun Yat Sen University all lectures were being given in either Mandarin or some provincial dialect, neither of which I could meaningfully follow – something I had been dreading in my mind. But Luck presented me with a fresh option when news arrived that Lingnan University had just opened a campus for their Arts Faculty near Shaoguan, with generous help from American Protestant missionaries. I knew for certain that the medium of instruction at Lingnan was either Cantonese or English.

Consequently, in November 1942, I reported in a happier frame of mind to Lingnan University at 'Lingnan Village', about thirty kilometres or an hour's ride by train north of Shaoguan. My spirits

on arrival were further lifted by news of Montgomery's victory at El Alamein and the successful landings in North Africa by Allied forces under Eisenhower.

The British Consulate Office where my father worked was at the foot of a hill within walking distance of Wu-Li-Ting, the first train-stop five kilometres north of Shaoguan. My father shared living quarters adjoining the office with Mr. Sedgwick, the Officer-in-Charge. Over Christmas, with Mr. Sedgwick away, my father and I had a pleasant and restful time together in his comfortable quarters, with a male servant providing domestic help and even serving western-style meals. My father was almost like his old self again as he chatted happily with me about the war. At the time the Russians were tightening the ring around the Germans at Stalingrad, Rommel was fighting a losing battle in Libya, the U.S. Marines were gaining the upper hand in Guadalcanal, and there was a temporary lull in the various war zones in Free China. We had plenty to discuss and many memories to share. What a far cry it was from Christmas the year before!

1943

At the beginning of the year, P.T. was reassigned to Chongqing, the capital of Free China, in the heart of Sichuan Province. After arrival in Guilin he journeyed for several days by military truck, westward across Guizhou Province and then northward into Sichuan. A good part of the road linking Guiyang, the provincial capital of Guizhou, to Chongqing wound its way across mountainous terrain; long sections of the tortuous route had been hacked out of sheer precipice, making hazardous hairpin bends. From P.T.'s truck the wreckage of fallen vehicles could be seen littering the valleys below. The truck drivers in the military convoy were openly picking up civilian passengers and illicitly charging them fares to line their own pockets.

On arrival at Chongqing, P.T. assumed the post of Secretary, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, to General Wong Chun Kow, Head of the Air Defence Ministry. He also gave English lessons at night in the Central Military Academy to army officers who were earmarked for reassignment to two newly-formed Chinese armies in preparation for a counter-offensive in Burma: one was based at Ramgarh in India, and the other at Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Those armies were placed under the command of Lieutenant General Stilwell, the notional American Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai Shek. Stilwell had been appointed directly as a result of pressure from President Roosevelt, and he had the dubious

distinction of being continually snubbed and ignored by the Chinese leader.

During Patrick's stay with my mother and the two youngest sisters in a suburban home in Guilin, he seized every opportunity to watch dogfights in the clear autumn sky between the Japanese and General Chennault's 'Flying Tigers', the famous American Volunteer Group which, after Pearl Harbour, became the China Air Task Force. Early in 1943 he went to Shaoguan where, after several frustrating weeks, a challenging job came his way. He was engaged by Lieutenant Commander J. Davies, a British Naval Intelligence Officer, as his secretary and interpreter. For many weeks, the two of them travelled together along the South China coast, under trying conditions and hazardous circumstances. Their mission was to set up observation posts for tracking Japanese naval movements for transmission to Allied Intelligence. Regretfully, Davies happened to belong to the infamous breed of British colonial bullies who did nothing but harm to Britain's image and reputation overseas. On his return to Shaoguan towards the end of 1943, Patrick resigned his post in disgust and shortly afterwards joined the Political Department of the Seventh War Zone.

After accompanying my father to Shaoguan, P.C. took Norma and Anthony to Guiyang, where he left them behind with a military family before returning to Chongqing to attend special training at the Army War College. A few months later, P.C. was made a Colonel and sent back to Shaoguan to take over the command of the Model Regiment.

General Yu Han Mou, the Commander-in-Chief of the Seventh War Zone which took in all of Guangdong Province, had established his headquarters in Shaoguan, some two hundred kilometres north of Guangzhou. The Japanese forces facing him were mainly concentrated in the southern portion of the province around Guangzhou and the adjacent Pearl River basin, but also held all the key cities along the coast. The Model Regiment, a supposedly crack unit in General Yu's Seventh Army, was deployed around Chang Le Village, about ten kilometres south of Shaoguan, serving as the focal point of defence against any Japanese attack from the south. The portly, stately Commander-in-Chief was a frequent visitor to the village, where his third wife happened to reside.

P.C. arrived at Chang Le Village with his wife and son in the middle of 1943. Much to his chagrin, the Model Regiment, notwithstanding its reputation, was found to be grossly under strength on account of corruption which was rampant in the Nationalist Army; it was also poorly fed, inadequately equipped and

in dire need of training. As the new commander, P.C. had his work cut out for him. From the time of his arrival until the Japanese offensive late in 1944, P.C. devoted his time, energy and professional skills to strengthening the defences, getting his regiment into shape and hardening the troops for battle.

Early in 1943, my father decided to have his own house built on the crest of the hill overlooking his office. The simple little wartime bungalow, made of bamboo and plaster, was completed in a matter of weeks; it had two bedrooms, a small sitting and dining area, and separate servant's quarters. Before long my mother and my two younger sisters arrived from Guilin and moved into the new home with my father. They were joined by Ah Oi, a faithful servant from Shelley Street, who had come all the way from Hong Kong.

As complete strangers living in a remote suburb of Guilin, my mother and my two sisters had virtually been isolated, not knowing what each day might bring. It was such a happy change for them to be reunited with my father and to feel safe and secure by his side. By an incredible stroke of luck, my mother had not had another attack of neuralgia since the fall of Hong Kong; in fact it never recurred for the rest of her life. The malady that had given her so much pain and distress so often in time of peace was suddenly cured, without any medication, in time of war!

At Shaoguan Winnie resumed her studies at True Light Middle School, relocated from Hong Kong, while Rosalind went to stay with Pak Chuen and Norma at Chang Le Village for the convenience of attending a primary school right at their doorstep.

At the time, according to Chinese intelligence, all was quiet on the southern front in the Seventh War Zone and Shaoguan was in no apparent danger of coming under attack. For a while it looked as if we could simply mark time and wait serenely for the Allies to win the war, one way or another.

1943 turned out to be quite a pleasant and interesting year for me at Lingnan. The university campus was small but well-planned, sprawling across rolling hills, the highest point of which was crowned by a magnificent cluster of huge, spreading camphor trees.

At this point the reader may well wonder why students in those days did not have to join the Chinese Army. The reason is not far to seek. The Nationalist Government had decided early on, as a matter of policy, that because students were so few relative to the total population, they should be encouraged to continue with their studies with a view to participating in the major task of postwar reconstruction. Hence, conscription was confined to the semi-literate or illiterate, mainly peasants, who were often press-ganged

into service. Such a policy naturally entailed terrible social injustice, while inflicting untold suffering on the conscripts and their families. It must also have had a direct bearing on the quality of the army as a fighting force.

There were perhaps four hundred students in the Lingnan Arts Faculty, most of them from 'Chinese' schools in Hong Kong, with a few like myself from either the University of Hong Kong or 'English' schools. Life at the campus was orderly and Spartan. The students were accommodated in five dormitories, three for men and two for women, and slept in narrow two-tier bunks. Every student had an indispensable oil lamp for use after dark. Two simple, standard meals a day were served in a refectory, one at mid-morning after the first two lectures and the other in late afternoon; each meal invariably consisted of unpolished rice and vegetables with perhaps a sprinkling of meat. Students took their baths and did their laundry in open wooden sheds with water drawn from a well, even when temperatures were hovering near freezing in winter.

As can be expected in wartime, there was very little scope for serious academic learning and intellectual development at Lingnan. Not surprisingly, few of the teaching staff were of university calibre, and books of substance were simply unavailable in the library. Nevertheless, hard times helped to bring out the best in the human spirit. Many of my Lingnan contemporaries, both men and women, distinguished themselves by the traits they valued and shared with others: a strong sense of discipline, a keen community spirit and mental toughness in coping with stress and uncertainty. One of them, David Lam See Chai, was destined to become the twenty-fifth Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia in 1988.

In *Voices From A Community*, the co-authors Evelyn Huang and Lawrence Jeffery wrote:

Dr. Lam left an established career in banking in Hong Kong and came to Vancouver in 1967 with his wife and three young daughters to begin a new career, embarking on a life that would lead to unimaginable financial success and social distinction. Discipline, openness of mind and a trenchant understanding of human nature are perhaps the key ingredients to this success. David Lam has risen to one of the highest offices in Canada, a position formerly reserved for members of the Anglo-Saxon establishment.

Mine being the upper berth of a bunk in the Number One Dormitory, I quickly struck up a lively acquaintance with David Cheung, the occupant of the lower berth. Happy-go-lucky, high-spirited and full of frolic and fun, David was a wonderful little guy with a big heart whose innocent look and mischievous smile reminded me of Fred Astaire. Soon we became bosom friends.

One winter evening, when everyone was in bed but no one was ready to fall asleep, two of the inmates somehow started the ball rolling by cracking dirty jokes aloud, well within hearing of the entire dormitory. It did not take long for others to pitch in. There erupted, in complete darkness, a boisterous and sustained verbal crossfire from all sides, targeted exclusively on sex, and interrupted from time to time by lewd laughter and wild screams of delight. One of the major combatants was none other than David Cheung, who rose magnificently to the occasion by coming up with some of the most outrageous swear-words I have ever heard in my life. What an extraordinary night! When day dawned, things were back to normal: everyone quietly went about their humdrum routine of attending lectures, David was his usual sweet and gentle self, and the Number One Dormitory was, as ever, a model community of highly respectable and well-mannered undergraduates.

I was one of many students who often took the train to Shaoguan to visit their family or friends on the weekend. One Saturday, I was walking home from Wu-Li-Ting when the air raid alarm sounded, followed by the sound of explosions nearby. As I instinctively ran behind a boulder for cover, some Japanese planes made a fleeting appearance overhead, diving and strafing. In an emplacement on the hill above me, two Chinese soldiers could be seen firing a machine-gun at the hostile aircraft. One plane flew so low on a strafing run in front of me that I could actually see the goggles worn by the pilot. The thrilling spectacle lasted barely a minute or two. On another occasion, lectures were in progress at Lingnan when faint explosions coming from the direction of Shaoguan could be heard for quite some time at the campus. Later it was learnt that the suburban area of Huang-tian-ba in Shaoguan had been razed to the ground by incendiaries.

The Lingnan campus also attracted frequent visitors from Shaoguan. When Simon Li, an old friend from the University of Hong Kong, paid me a visit, he decided to stay for the night, accepting my offer of half my bunk-bed, which was about thirty inches wide at best. Through a hilarious process of trial and error, we finally arrived at an amicable *modus operandi* whereby we managed to sleep peacefully back to back all night without falling

onto the floor.

The three men taking English lessons from Margaret in Chikan all worked at the 'Institute for International Affairs': one of them was the boss. Behind the facade of its rather dubious name, the organization was in fact an intelligence arm of the Nationalist Government. Humming with espionage, Chikan was perhaps not unlike Casablanca, as depicted in the famous Hollywood movie by that name. Margaret needed little persuasion to join the Institute, especially when the job carried the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Thus, she became involved in coding and de-coding sensitive data and secret reports, while also acting as custodian of confidential documents and paraphernalia. Her daily activities also offered her endless opportunities for practising her spoken Mandarin and improving her written Chinese.

Sometime in 1943, anticipating the Japanese occupation of Leizhou Wan, the Institute moved with its entire staff to Meilu, a seaside village inside Free China. There, Margaret enjoyed the luxury (by wartime standards) afforded by decent offices, pleasant accommodation and domestic help. As can be expected, she often found herself meeting up with American military personnel. Halfway through a banquet, the two American Officers sitting on either side of her were looking so glum that she asked them seriously if she could be of help.

'Yes, indeed,' they replied, with a deep sigh of relief, 'Can we have some iced water please?'

On another occasion, while being introduced to some American intelligence officers, she was asked pointedly, 'Are you really a Mata Hari?'

Back came Margaret's swift rejoinder, 'Not in all respects!'

1944/45

At the instigation of Lieutenant General Lee, P.T. was transferred back to Shaoguan in early 1944. Now an Intelligence Officer in close contact with the Americans, he reported daily to General Yu Han Mou. Meanwhile, at the Political Department, Patrick was serving as a major with multiple duties: he was Lee's English secretary, interpreter and translator, and also a group leader responsible for cultivating, through the promotion of sports and drama in rural areas, a healthy relationship between the army and the peasants. Both P.T. and Patrick were being recognized by Lee as two of the best-educated staff officers in the Seventh War Zone.

On a weekend in Shaoguan I was invited by Patrick to the première of a play produced by the Political Department; the small

cast was drawn from some of his colleagues. The play was mainly wartime propaganda dressed up as a love story. Funnily enough, the background music was not Chinese; instead, a recording of Ravel's *Bolero* was played over and over again during the performance.

However, what I really enjoy recalling is neither the play itself, which was humdrum, nor the music, which, unaccompanied by the ice dancing of Torvill and Dean, sounded decidedly monotonous. From my perspective, the best part of the evening took place before the rise of the curtain.

When the arrival of the Commander-in-Chief was solemnly announced, the entire audience rose to their feet in an atmosphere of excitement and expectation. Then General Yu Han Mou, the front of his uniform festooned with decorations, swept into view, striding augustly down the centre aisle. Following closely behind was his charming entourage of four wives, all splendidly dressed for the occasion. The General took the seat reserved for him at the front and his wives sat down right beside him, presumably in order of seniority. Their curiosity and admiration aroused, the audience took a little while to settle down after the grand spectacle. When calm was finally restored, the lights dimmed for the opening act, leaving me with a rare firsthand impression of the lifestyle of a former warlord from a vanishing era.

Following the appointment of Eisenhower as Supreme Commander in January 1944, the newspapers were filled with wild speculations of an imminent Allied landing in France. It was tempting for the layman, tired of war, to jump to the conclusion that the Axis Powers were about to collapse and final victory lay within easy grasp. But in early spring, quite to the contrary, the Japanese launched a sweeping offensive in Free China, in a desperate attempt to knock out Chiang Kai Shek and his government before the Allies could effectively intervene.

Within a few weeks, the Japanese wrested control of the entire Beijing-Hankou railway in north China, and all signs pointed to an impending Japanese attack on Shaoguan, which stood in the way of a direct link-up between Hankou and Guangzhou. People were streaming out of Shaoguan in panic. The British Consulate Office was closed down. On the advice of P.C., my parents travelled by truck with myself, Winnie, Rosalind, Norma, Anthony and Ah Oi into neighbouring Jiangxi Province, heading for Longnan, a town a hundred kilometres to the east.

At the outset of the journey, my father was already suffering badly from dysentery. That same evening the truck had to park, on account of road conditions, well outside a desolate village where we

tracked down an inn, which was no better than a hovel. Ah Oi bravely volunteered to stay for the night in the truck, with all our baggage, in the midst of nowhere. The possibility that it might be unsafe for her to be all alone in the wilderness never seemed to bother her. I would have liked to have kept her company, but in view of my father's dreadful condition, I had to struggle with my conscience before deciding to be with him at the inn, for fear that he might die. Throughout the night my father remained in dire agony, without any medication to give him relief, and all that my mother and I could do was to sit up with him. It would be difficult for me to forget the look of suffering on my father's face that evening, or the single-minded devotion of an illiterate servant, who acted so scrupulously in accordance with her strong sense of duty.

My father survived the night and, after arrival at Longnan the next day, responded to medical treatment. A few days later, all our cares were momentarily forgotten when we woke up in the morning to be greeted by news of the Allied landing in Normandy on June 6. However, unknown to anyone, my father was not completely cured; the disease had seriously sapped his constitution and would return one day after the war to haunt him.

In Longnan we rented a farmer's hut which amounted to just one large room where we all slept and had our meals. As in all villages I had been to, sanitary conditions were abominable. At dusk the place was invaded by swarms of mosquitoes, which literally darkened the outside of every mosquito net. To get into bed at night, we had to master the tricky technique of crawling as quickly as possible into the net, without allowing a single mosquito to get in as well.

Anthony was then not quite six years old; with his intelligent and endearing ways, he had become the apple of my father's eye. On those days in Longnan, Anthony, now a Professor at the University of Chicago, wrote to me in 1990:

I do retain a fond and vivid picture of grandfather in his daily routine of teaching me the rudiments of both vernacular and literary Chinese. From grandfather's repeated recitals and discourse, I first learnt to love Chinese classical verse and the importance of committing many to memory.

The anticipated Japanese attack on Shaoguan did not materialize. It was therefore considered reasonably safe for Norma and me to journey together back to Shaoguan, leaving the rest of the

family in Longnan for the time being. She rejoined Pak Chuen at Chang Le Village and I returned to Lingnan for my final term.

On General Yu's orders, deep and wide ditches had been dug across the railway at intervals of perhaps five metres, presumably to serve as tank obstacles. Students commuting between Shaoguan and Lingnan therefore had to rely solely on shanks's mare.

Only about half the normal complement of students had returned for the new term beginning in October 1944. Still, every Saturday morning, those wishing to visit Shaoguan for the weekend would make the journey together as a group, along the broken railway, for mutual protection against possible attack by robbers or army deserters, and return the next day in similar fashion. To get to the railway from the campus by a short cut, it was necessary to climb a formidable hill. At the top of the steep and trackless slope, the students would invariably pause for breath and a brief chat beneath an overhanging boulder. There was chiselled on the face of the boulder, by an unknown hand, a couplet in very large lettering, each line comprising four Chinese characters, meaning:

Weaklings do rest
Strong men need not linger

At noon one Sunday, as the students assembled at Wu-Li-Ting for the marathon walk back to Lingnan, I happened to be the lone male in the entire group of about a dozen students. It therefore fell to my lot to assume the leader's role as we embarked on our return journey.

Learning from experience, we tracked in single file along the torn railway, up and down the endless ditches, all the while aware of the possibility of coming under attack. To hide my fear and anxiety, I did my best to engage the girls in idle chatter and to look and sound like a confident leader. Nonetheless, I took great care to stay most of the time in the middle of the line, with half the group shielding me in front and the other half protecting me from the rear.

At long last, after several hours, with not too many breaks, we finally arrived back at the campus at twilight, exhausted but relieved. I was trying to find words to thank my fair ladies for their indispensable company when they gathered around me and insisted on taking me to dinner in the village tea-room. They had painted me in their imagination as a knight in shining armour! I squirmed in embarrassment as I sat through dinner as their guest of honour, feeling like a coward who had been awarded the Victoria Cross by mistake.

Suddenly, in November 1944, in a lightning thrust from the south, the Japanese appeared within striking distance of Shaoguan. Another Japanese army had already captured Guilin and Liuzhou over in Guangxi. Together with other students I fled the campus in a convoy of trucks superbly organized at short notice by the University. On arrival at Shaoguan I learnt to my relief that arrangements had been made by my brothers for me to evacuate with Lieutenant General Lee's wife and family to Longnan and also to act as tutor to the five children. At the same time my parents and the rest of their group took a truck from Longnan southward to Longchuan in the East River region, which was considered less likely to come under Japanese attack.

Caught napping by the dramatic turn of events, General Yu moved hastily to the southern part of neighbouring Jiangxi Province. To buy time for the orderly retreat and redeployment of General Yu's Seventh Army, P.C. was entrusted with the crucial task of fighting a determined rearguard action at Shaoguan. P.T. joined General Yu at his new headquarters. Patrick was dispatched to the East River region.

Shaoguan was attacked from three sides by a large Japanese force supported by Chinese 'puppet' detachments. Led by P.C., the defenders of Shaoguan showed their mettle by engaging the better-armed and numerically-superior enemy in bitter fighting, at times in fierce hand-to-hand combat, and for eighteen days fought them to a standstill. Try as they might, the Japanese could not achieve a breakthrough or complete the encirclement of the city. Both sides suffered heavy casualties, and the defenders were rapidly running out of supplies.

Chiang Kai Shek's original directive was for Shaoguan to be defended to the last man. However, as the situation became desperate, P.C. was finally ordered to pull out with as many men as he could before the trap closed. Then, and only then, did the valiant defenders retreat from the bloody battlefield under cover of night, with their heads held high, in the nick of time to avoid capture or massacre.

Sometime after the war, when speaking to me about the battle, P.C. was still haunted by the memory of his many wounded soldiers, who had been left behind to an enemy notorious for butchering prisoners of war.

At this stage China was on the verge of collapse, its armies reeling in retreat, its economy ravaged by war and inflation, its Government corrupt and floundering. Despite the gravity of the situation, Chiang Kai Shek never visited Shaoguan or any part of the

Seventh War Zone. It was also generally known that, throughout the war, provincial troops did most of the fighting against the Japanese. Chiang's own crack troops, hand-picked for loyalty to him and armed with modern weapons supplied by the Allies, amounted to perhaps half a million or more men. But they were always held in reserve, ostensibly for the final counter-offensive against the enemy, but probably to protect Chiang in the event of an attack by Mao Zedong or any other potential rebel. Those troops were only seen in public when parading in spotless uniforms in Chongqing in front of visiting VIPs, such as Wendell Wilkie from the United States.

As the Japanese armies carried all before them, Chiang sent out a call to arms for the first time to university and high school students in Free China. The stirring message was embellished with the elegance of a classical couplet, which can be translated as follows:

An inch of fatherland,
An inch of blood!
A hundred thousand students,
A hundred thousand warriors!

Tens of thousands of students, indeed, immediately flocked to the colours. Chiang's simple, majestic appeal caught the mood of the nation – bruised, battered, but unbowed – and, like Tennyson's famous lines from *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, has claimed a permanent place in my memory.

When Mrs. Lee and her family left Shaoguan for Longnan, they were provided with armed guards, but motor transport was unavailable for part of the way. For two days every member of the party had to journey on foot, during which a middle-aged captain and I took turns carrying three-year-old Michael, the youngest of the Lee children, on our shoulders.

After the fall of Shaoguan, Longnan was considered vulnerable to Japanese attack. Lieutenant General Lee sent his family a long way south to the East River region in a military truck. I travelled separately in a public van into which were crammed far too many people, all fleeing to safer havens. Before long the stale air inside the vehicle turned foul. When some passengers started getting sick, the stench was unbearable. I got out at a convenient break and, with the driver's permission, deposited myself on the hood of the vehicle in front of the passenger sitting next to him. I managed to find something to hang on to with my bare hands. For four days, in all kinds of weather, I crouched and squatted contentedly in this awkward position, while jolting, bumping and lumbering along

unpaved roads at perhaps thirty or forty kilometres an hour.

In the course of the journey I got a little acquainted with a garrulous junior army officer, who sounded at times like Casanova bragging about his amorous conquests.

‘Neglected concubines’, he told me categorically, ‘make the best lovers: they are passionate, they are clean, and they would never tell!’

Days later I rejoined the Lee family at Yanqian, a village just inside Fujian Province, across the eastern border of Guangdong. The Lees were guests of a prominent local landlord, a former Nationalist general still addressed by everyone as Army Commander Mok, who probably owned most of the land in the area. The host and his concubine lived in a luxurious mansion, which seemed almost as large as the medieval castles often seen in Hollywood movies. The place abounded with rooms, servants and food. There, in the depth of winter, I certainly lived comfortably and ate well. But every time I stepped outside the mansion, I could see only poor people in shabby, tattered clothing, shuffling along the one main street in bitterly cold weather. Yanqian has left in my memory a clear picture of sharp contrasts: opulence in the midst of poverty in a feudal society.

It was plain sailing for me to teach the five young children – Yun Wah (the eldest daughter), Marion, Margaret, Martin and Michael – elementary English, beginning with the alphabet, but I was frequently at a loss trying to explain Chinese texts. However, instead of firing me for incompetence, Mrs. Lee pampered me like a mother. Indeed I had a happy time with the five smart and jovial children.

Sometime after the war, Yun Wah settled in the United States, and Marion in England. Margaret is a District Judge in New Zealand. Both of the brothers are leading lights in Hong Kong: Martin is a successful barrister, an elected member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, and the leader of the Democratic Party who hit the headlines when, shortly before Hong Kong’s return to China in July 1997, he was received in turn by John Major at 10 Downing Street and Bill Clinton in the White House; Michael, the little one nicknamed ‘Ah Bum’ whom I carried on my shoulders while running away from the Japanese, is a famous neurologist. I take the common sense precaution of never reminding any of them, either on occasional contact or by Christmas card, that I once tried to teach them Chinese.

Slowly but surely, winter gave way to spring. The Japanese were thwarted in their desperate attempt to reach Chongqing, while being beaten relentlessly in both Burma and the Pacific. The Germans were surrendering en masse on all fronts, and on May 8, 1945

Truman and Churchill declared V.E. (Victory in Europe) Day. With some reluctance I left my post as family tutor to rejoin my parents at Longchuan and await developments. The final assault on Japan still seemed many weeks or even months away. Then on August 6, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and, three days later, on Nagasaki. On August 14, V.J. (Victory in Japan) Day, Japan accepted the terms of unconditional surrender. For us the war ended almost as suddenly as it had begun three years and eight months previously.

In the midst of rejoicing, preparations began for our return journey to Hong Kong. It was learnt that from Longchuan we could sail downstream along the East River all the way to Guangzhou, less than three hundred kilometres away. After waiting for confirmation that Guangzhou had been fully reoccupied by the Nationalist Army, and Hong Kong by the British, we set sail in a large junk. Travelling with my parents, Winnie, Rosalind, Norma, Anthony, Ah Oi and me were a few Lingnan students, including Wong Wai Wah, P. T.'s wartime sweetheart.

It took us quite a few days to reach Guangzhou. We sailed only during the day, dropping anchor well before dusk and spending the night on board. One afternoon someone hanging around at the bow yelled out aloud,

'Watch out! Here come the Japanese!'

We leapt to our feet, fearing imminent massacre. Sure enough, along the river bank to our left, thousands of Japanese soldiers were marching splendidly upstream in tight formation, as if on parade, their arms swinging and their bayonets glinting in the sun. They certainly did not look like a defeated army. But far from being a threat, they did not even bother to take a look at our junk and its frightened, helpless occupants. They were probably on their way to surrender peacefully to some designated Chinese unit. As far as they were concerned, it was their unequivocal duty to obey their Emperor's call to lay down their arms. We were impressed by the remarkable discipline maintained by those proud troops in their tragic hour of defeat. But neither did we forget the atrocities committed by the victorious Japanese in Hong Kong and in China.

On another occasion I was about to doze off in broad daylight when shots were fired and several members of the crew shouted simultaneously,

'Bandits! Bandits!'

Everyone scrambled for cover inside the junk. I remember taking the tiny gold ring off my finger and hiding it in a corner. Although of little real value, the ring was my most precious possession, bought

with the little money I had managed to save up over the last three years. In the meantime the junk manoeuvred slowly towards where a few armed men were waiting on the river bank. There was a protracted exchange of shouts and arguments between the captain of the junk and the bandits. From where I was hiding I could not see all that was happening. Eventually, after the captain had tossed over a little bag of protection money, we were allowed to resume our journey unmolested.

On arrival at Guangzhou we were invited by Wong Wai Wah's parents to stay in their sumptuous home and treated royally like special guests – a wonderful change after so many days on board a junk. Her father, Wong Tak Kwong, was probably the best-known doctor in Guangzhou and even ran his own hospital. We were informed that we could not sail directly to Hong Kong, perhaps because of minefields. So we went by junk to Macao, where I made my acquaintance with my little niece, Margaret, the 'Bastille Day little lady', now three years old. A day or two later we finally arrived back in Hong Kong in a cargo junk, landing on the waterfront at West Point on a clear, crisp, windy day in November, shortly before my twenty-first birthday. Thus ended the nightmare of the perilous years.

After V.J. Day my sister Margaret and her colleagues went back to Leizhou Wan where they stayed for some time in a good hotel and were royally entertained by local businessmen as euphoria prevailed. Margaret collected a victory bonus of US\$150 with which she started building a little treasure chest. Her thoughts were already turning towards the prospect of furthering her education in the United States.

P.C. and P.T. returned to Shaoguan following the Japanese surrender. Patrick was one of seven liaison officers dispatched to Huizhou on the East River to facilitate the acceptance of the formal surrender of the Japanese Army in that area. In Huizhou Patrick saw for himself how much better equipped and supplied was the Japanese Army than the Chinese. Unfortunately, he could not help noticing that those Japanese weapons and supplies that should have been appropriated for the Nationalist Army were being sold to the Chinese Communists by the senior officers of his team for personal gain. Recoiling in shock, Patrick obtained permission to return to Shaoguan and, on arrival, immediately reported the appalling development to Lieutenant General Lee. Apparently, circumstances were such that the upright general was by that time powerless to do anything about it.

Tragically for China, the kind of corruption that Patrick

witnessed at first hand in Huizhou was merely the tip of the iceberg. The Nationalist Army under Chiang Kai Shek, poorly led and bogged down by corruption, simply could not stand up against an enemy as disciplined, as determined, and as fearless as Mao Zedong and his followers. As China's national leader in turbulent times, Chiang was wearing shoes that proved to be far too big for him. Ironically, by fighting with a one-track mind persistently but ineffectively against Mao, he made it easier in the end for China to be swamped by the Communist tide.

Not long afterwards both P.T. and Patrick resigned from the army and rejoined the family in Hong Kong. As a professional soldier, P.C. continued to serve the cause of the Nationalists.

With the exception of P.C. and Josephine, who was still in Shanghai, we were reunited in Shelley Street for our first Christmas together in four years. Apart from my father's harrowing experience with dysentery, we had all suffered in varying degrees from malaria. I had been afflicted at least nine times with the disease, each time accompanied by high fever and intense shivering. However, we had every reason to be extremely thankful that every member of our large family had come through the long and cruel war unscathed. Many of our friends and acquaintances were less fortunate, having experienced the pangs of loss in the family, either through violence or disease.

Naturally I began taking stock of my own situation. Although I had obtained a wartime degree from Lingnan, I would have been the first to admit that I had virtually nothing to show for it. I was acutely conscious of being at the crossroads. I was in dire need of a better education, on which my entire future would probably depend. Thanks to the war years, I had become more outgoing, self-confident and independent-minded and was craving for the kind of intellectual challenge that had long been identified in my mind with Oxford and Cambridge. If only I had the means to study in England!

Before leaving this chapter, I must bring up once more the name of Lieutenant General Lee Yin Woh. I first met him in Shaoguan in 1943 when, as Head of the Political Department in the Seventh War Zone and the undisputed right-hand man of General Yu Han Mou, the Commander-in-Chief, he was at the centre of power. In the course of the war all my three brothers served directly or indirectly under him. As an ill-qualified and untried youngster, I was fortunate to have been appointed by him as family tutor to his children at a time when the Japanese were at our heels. Forged in the dark days of war, the formal ties linking him to our family mellowed in time of

peace into a warm and lasting friendship.

A fearless and outspoken wartime leader, Lee was single-minded in his attempts to marshal the war effort behind the lines against the Japanese. He stood out among his contemporaries as a simple and artless man who led a Spartan life, shunned vested interests, detested political intrigue, and never abused power.

Unwavering in his convictions and uncompromising in matters of principle, he made the courageous decision in 1949 to sever all ties with the discredited Nationalist Government which had fled to Taiwan, while spurning repeated invitations to join the Chinese Communists in Beijing. Instead, with honour and dignity, he chose the path of poverty and obscurity by going quietly into voluntary exile in Hong Kong.

After going through a difficult period, Lee succeeded in establishing himself as a well-respected teacher in Hong Kong. By the time he passed away in 1989, all his children were doing well in their chosen walks of life and his wife was living in very comfortable circumstances. At the Requiem Mass in St. Joseph's Church, which was attended by a packed congregation, my brother Patrick paid solemn tribute to his former chief in a moving eulogy.

Conspicuous among the mourners at the funeral were representatives from both Beijing and Taipei. That the two rival governments should have chosen to put aside their differences momentarily in order to give simultaneous recognition in public to a Chinese patriot who had served his country nobly and well, was a unique honour of which Lee would have been proud.

CHAPTER 13

Cambridge, 1946-49

On VJ Day, there were only about 600,000 people remaining in Hong Kong, a million fewer than in 1941. British troops returned to the city on August 30, 1945, civil government was re-established in May 1946 and, by the end of the year, the population was back to its pre-war level.

During the latter part of the Second World War, Hong Kong had been repeatedly attacked by American planes. On our return to Shelley Street the house was found, to our great relief, to have been untouched by bombs. In fact it had been well maintained by my uncle Mr. Lam who, through a verbal understanding with my father, had been living there with his family during our absence from Hong Kong. My mother was thrilled to be mistress of the house again, doing her best to cope with postwar shortages and inflation and happily counting her blessings in her familiar place of worship at home.

When my father got back to the Education Department, Mr. Arthur St. G. Walton, the first postwar Director of Education, and Y.P. Law were there to greet him. He was told that S.Y. Tong, my sister Sheung Woon's husband, had already been recruited to fill a vacancy for an Inspector of Vernacular Schools. Both my father and Y.P. enjoyed a healthy rapport with Arthur Walton, as they worked together on the daunting task of postwar reconstruction.

Before long a letter with a Shanghai postmark arrived, couched in traditionally formal and flamboyant language and bearing glad and welcome tidings. It came from the father of Lena So, with whom my sister Josephine had been staying after the fall of Hong Kong, seeking my father's consent to the marriage of Josephine to his only son Kwok Chu. Quietly, with no one from the Yu family able to attend, Josephine got married in Shanghai early in 1946. A few months later she came back to Hong Kong with her husband to resume her teaching career at Sacred Heart School.

There was also heartening news for my brothers P.T. and Patrick: they and their contemporaries were given a wartime degree by the University of Hong Kong. Then came the surprise announcement by the Hong Kong Government that six 'Victory Scholarships' would be awarded by the Colonial Office to local

students to continue their education at a British university.

Within days, Patrick and I were standing in a long line of applicants, waiting anxiously for our turn to appear before Arthur Walton and his selection panel and hoping against hope for the best possible outcome. With his distinguished academic record and respectable war service, Patrick could well have been a clear winner right from the start. However, when the names of the Victory Scholars were posted, both of us, to our unalloyed joy, were listed among the lucky six. It seemed almost too good to be true that one-third of the available scholarships should have gone to one family! My parents were ecstatic that two more of their children would soon be on their way to England, by virtue of a happy legacy of war. How inscrutable, how remarkable, how delightful is the working of Providence!

In those days British universities were flooded with thousands of ex-servicemen receiving government grants for post-secondary education. Hence, notwithstanding the combined efforts of the Colonial Office and the Education Department in Hong Kong, getting the Victory Scholars admitted to any university in Britain for the academic year beginning in October 1946, was indeed a matter of real concern. Taking the bull by the horns, my father decided to write independently to Merton College on behalf of Patrick, while P.C. made a similar approach to Pembroke for my benefit, bearing in mind that Cambridge offered a highly-acclaimed course in Economics, my preferred field of study.

While awaiting developments, I took a job as English Secretary at C.K. Hung and Co., which combined an import and export business with the operation of the Hop Hing Peanut Oil Factory, possibly the largest of its kind in Hong Kong at the time. I was paid a meagre salary of HK\$200 a month. However, apart from routine correspondence, there was little to keep me meaningfully occupied, and the feeling of boredom that quickly set in made me all the more anxious to set off for distant shores.

It was in August 1946 that the first batch of Hong Kong students to go to England after the war departed for Singapore on board the *Menelaus*, without knowing which universities they would be joining. They were the Victory Scholars and a few others who went at their own expense, including my old friend Simon Li and his bride Lillian.

Owing to the acute shipping shortage worldwide, we were held up in Singapore for three weeks. My aunt Mrs. Yong Shook Lin, the elder of my father's two younger sisters, and her daughters came down from Kuala Lumpur to meet us; her only son Pung How had



My parents in their early years, 1909-10



*My father,
the Inspector of Vernacular Schools, 1920s*



My parents in their sixties



*Five tiny tots who grew up together, 1925
From left to right; P.T., Josephine holding Brian, Margaret, Patrick*



*The Three Fishes at 15/17 Shelley Street
Brian, P.T., Patrick*



*The Three Fishes on stage together
Brian (the page) standing behind P.T. (the doge), Patrick (Portia) challenging Shylock
in "The Merchant of Venice"*



*Chinese Errol Flynn or
Douglas Fairbanks, Jr?
(Brian fencing at Cambridge, 1947)*



*Brian slaving away
at Cambridge*



P.C., the eldest brother (1955)



Sai Wan War Cemetery (Hong Kong)



Brian and Mamie on their 45th wedding anniversary, 1996



Brian and Mamie at Lake Louise, 1983



Brian, Mamie and Family, 1991

*Standing: From left to right; Brian Eng, Teresa, Peter, Marian and Joseph Yao
Sitting: Brian and Mamie with granddaughters, Catherine and Christine*

already left for Cambridge. By chance I met a bumptious Singapore Government Scholar by the name of Lee Kuan Yew, who was also scrambling for passage to England. In time Lee got a double first in Law at Cambridge, went into politics and won international renown as Singapore's Prime Minister for three uninterrupted decades.

Finally we sailed from Singapore in the *Britannic*, a converted troopship, into which perhaps as many as two thousand demobilized British soldiers were packed like sardines. During the crossing of the Indian Ocean, some of them provided entertainment by staging a variety show; the one melody which has remained with me ever since is *If You Were The Only Girl In The World*, sung with feeling and relish by the homesick and lovesick amateur cast. As we glided at a snail's pace up the Suez Canal in broad daylight, the wreckage of military hardware scattered along its banks came into view, a sober reminder of the Desert War. Days later, while the ship was pitching and rolling in a choppy sea in the Bay of Biscay, Patrick received a telegram which opened a new chapter in his life: it was from my father, congratulating him on the wonderful news that he had been accepted unconditionally as an Oxford undergraduate by the Warden of Merton – Sir John Miles!

On arrival at Liverpool at the beginning of October, we were met by a representative from the Colonial Office and taken to London. I was informed that I was to join the London School of Economics and stay at a hostel for foreign students, mainly from Africa and India. But I felt strongly that living among Africans and Asians and commuting daily in the vast metropolis to attend lectures would not be the best way for me to study for a degree in England, to learn to speak English properly, and to make English friends. As far as I was concerned, England meant Cambridge! By that time the academic year was just about to begin. It was, therefore, with a sense of urgency and desperation that I made my first train trip from Liverpool Street to Cambridge and knocked on the door of Pembroke.

I was taken to see Mr. W.A. Camps, a lecturer in Classics who also held the offices of senior tutor and tutor for admissions at Pembroke. He immediately put me at my ease by mentioning that he had previously met P.C. in college and that he had even corresponded about me with Mr. Ferguson, the Registrar of the University of Hong Kong before the war. In his mid-thirties, Mr. Camps (universally known as Tony) was tall and clean-shaven, wore horn-rimmed glasses, and spoke with an occasional stammer. While I was stumbling nervously in his presence, he took his time to ask me questions and listened patiently to what I had to say. His

distinctive accent, his distinguished bearing and his quiet charm fitted him exactly to the image of the Oxbridge don and English gentleman that my father had crafted so carefully in my mind. At the end of our conversation, he told me to telephone him from London the next day, by which time he should be able to tell me whether I would be accepted for the Economics Tripos (tripos is the Cambridge name for the honours examination leading to the BA degree).

My heart was pounding as I dialled Pembroke and waited for Mr. Camps, the arbiter of my fate, to pick up my call. Then his voice came clearly over the phone:

‘Pembroke will be delighted to have YU!’

At those magic words, my cup of happiness was immediately filled to overflowing. Rushing to a post office nearby I wired the great news to my father, the architect of my golden dream that had finally come true. I felt as if, in God’s mysterious ways, my sedate and sheltered childhood and adolescence, followed by the testing and turbulent years of war, had somehow prepared me for this opportunity of a lifetime. It was now up to me to make the most of it.

On my way back to Cambridge, I decided to start using my Christian name, Brian, for ease of identification, even though I would be enrolled as Kwai Ko Yu. As I passed through the main entrance of Pembroke facing Trumpington Street, a dignified, elderly, bowler-hatted porter - Mr. Cronk, a soldier of the First World War - slipped out of the lodge to greet me. As soon as he heard my name, he asked ever so politely:

‘Excuse me, sir. Are you by any chance related to Mr. P.C. Yu?’

That was precisely how my first day began in college, at the start of the Michaelmas term.

Henceforth, for the better part of three years, I would be walking through courts and looking up at towers and spires; strolling, bicycling or punting along the Backs, and loitering and day-dreaming in the incomparable setting; attending lectures and tutorials, reading in the Marshall Library and browsing in bookshops; working in my college rooms in my first year and subsequently in digs, first on Silver Street and later on Brookside; attending Mass in Fisher House or St. Margaret’s Church; picking up mail from my pigeon-hole on the wall in the common-room, having tea with fellow-students and dining in hall. Those were happy days, mesmerizing days, challenging days. Cambridge, with its atmosphere, its traditions, its culture, and its people, took possession of me and was to exert a lasting influence on both my

career and my personal life.

Cambridge, often described as 'perhaps the only true university town in England', is located about ninety kilometres north-east of London. Most of the town is built on the east bank of the Cam. There were then twenty-one colleges (nineteen for men and two for women) and perhaps 10,000 students in all (over ten per cent of the local population) at Cambridge. Today there are thirty-one colleges (nearly all coeducational), including several which were not recognized as part of the University in my time, and over 10,000 undergraduates and 4,500 postgraduates, with one-tenth of the total coming from over a hundred countries outside the United Kingdom. At both Cambridge and Oxford, it is the colleges, not the faculties, that are responsible for the admission of undergraduates, and for their accommodation and welfare; their tutors and directors of studies determine what subject an undergraduate should read and what papers he or she should sit for in the examinations.

Cambridge has historically been a masculine society, and men still hold a preponderance of college Fellowships and faculty appointments. It was only in the 1880s that dons other than professors and the heads of colleges were permitted to marry. Women were not appointed to University posts until 1926. While an undergraduate, I was unaware that women were awarded University degrees for the first time in 1947.

Pembroke is the third oldest college in Cambridge, following Peterhouse (1284) and Clare (1326). Founded as The Hall of Valence Mary by a French lady, Marie de St Pol, the Countess of Pembroke, the College received its charter from Edward III on Christmas Eve 1347. Later it became Pembroke Hall and in 1856 Pembroke College. Marie was seventeen when she married Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke. Legend says that she was a maid, wife and widow all in one day because her fifty-year-old husband was killed in front of her in a friendly joust on their wedding day. Though probably not substantiated by facts, the tale is simply too good to be allowed to pass into oblivion.

There stands beside the Victorian Library a prominent statue of William Pitt the Younger, the illustrious son of Pembroke, who came up in 1773 when he was only fourteen years old and took his degree at seventeen, availing himself of the provision which allowed sons of noblemen to dispense with the commonplace and demeaning business of actually sitting for an examination. He became a Member of Parliament when he was eighteen, Chancellor of the Exchequer at twenty-two, and Prime Minister at twenty-four. One of his famous

quotations, 'Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves', seems to have lost none of its validity even in modern times. A case in point is the cold-blooded massacre of students in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989

On the evening of my arrival at Pembroke, I was sent for by Mr. Rowe, a college don and tutor in Economics. At my appearance, he broke the ice by asking me for my views on the civil war that was breaking out in China. Then, after touching on some of the formidable economic problems confronting postwar Great Britain, he paused, looked intently at me through his half-glasses, and remarked thoughtfully:

'I'm afraid both your country and mine are in a bit of a mess.'

Accordingly I replied:

'Yes, sir, but yours is an orderly mess and mine a disorderly one.'

Mr. Rowe was a lecturer in Industry, an expert on primary commodity markets and, at Keynes' instigation, the author of a celebrated memorandum on the great crisis of 1930-32. I was rather surprised when he offered me the option of skipping Part One of the Economics Tripos, a one-year programme, and proceeding straightaway to the two-year programme for Part Two. This would have put me in a position to graduate at the end of two years instead of three. However, knowing my own limitations and determined to spend as much time in England as my scholarship allowed, I decided there and then to read for the complete Economics Tripos.

I was a month short of my twenty-second birthday, almost the same age as my father at the time of his arrival at Merton. Many of my contemporaries, being ex-servicemen, were already in their mid- or late twenties, and not a few of them were married.

My father used to tell me how much his black gown had meant to him at Oxford. Now I was wearing mine with a sense of pride and awe as I attended my first lectures at Mill Lane, a stone's throw from Pembroke. My self-esteem as an earnest disciple of Economics was considerably heightened when a tall, middle-aged don by the name of Dennison began his very first lecture on Industrial Organization, with a wicked smile on his face, along these lines:

'Welcome to the Cambridge School of Economics! As everyone knows, only those who have no flair for languages, no feeling for history, no talent for law, no aptitude for mathematics, and no hope of getting accepted for either science or engineering or medicine are qualified to read for the Economics Tripos!'

His unequivocal words of unqualified inspiration were greeted at

once with loud cheers and wild thumping of desks.

Over the next three years the lectures I enjoyed most were those given by Professor Robertson, Keynes' successor, and Mr. Habakkuk. Robertson was without peers in his ability to expound economic principles in simple, elegant language that compelled attention and admiration. Habakkuk, a young Pembroke don, had the knack of making Economic History come alive like an absorbing human drama. During the Second World War, he was one of the cryptanalysts at Bletchley Park which made history by breaking the supposedly unbreakable German Enigma machine cipher and helping to shorten the Second World War.

The academic year at Cambridge is divided into three terms: Michaelmas, Lent and Easter, each of eight weeks' duration. Interestingly, attendance at lectures at both Cambridge and Oxford is entirely at students' discretion. It is in the mandatory weekly tutorial, a distinct method of teaching at those two universities, that individual students sort out their difficulties, submit essays for criticism and learn to debate calmly and sensibly a point at issue. Through the tutorial, the tradition of close contact between teacher and student is maintained as an enviable source of intellectual vitality.

For part of my time, I had two tutors each week, Mr. Rowe and an Irish postgraduate whose name has escaped me. However I had to share each tutorial with one other student, and he and I took turns to read a prepared essay or join the tutor in commenting on the other's written effort. Daunting at first, the tutorial became the part of my academic work that I invariably looked forward to with anticipation. To have been rewarded by Mr. Rowe, once in a while, with an alpha for an essay written after a good deal of reading and forethought would indeed have filled me with a lively sense of satisfaction.

There were not too many Chinese students at Cambridge, and most of them were from Singapore and Malaya. The few sent by Chiang Kai Shek's collapsing government looked as if they were in their late twenties or early thirties, if not older. At Pembroke there was, apart from myself, but one other Chinese student, a postgraduate from Shanghai. In my Economics class, I was the only Chinese.

During a break between lectures in my very first week at Cambridge, a classmate with a well-trimmed moustache and a fine military bearing struck up a conversation with me. He was Wilf Saunders from Fitzwilliam, a former captain in the Eighth Army and a Dunkirk survivor. Later I became acquainted with two fellow

Pembroke members, Tony Hudson, a teenage Exhibitioner, and Timothy McKenzie, a Franciscan Friar, to both of whom I was initially drawn by our common religious faith. In my second year I met Leslie Barnes, another economist from Fitzwilliam, who during the war had served in the War Office and as a member of the British Military Mission visiting Ottawa. These four became my close associates at Cambridge and, eventually, lifelong friends. Yet another friend of mine was Erling Ronneberg, a classmate from Trinity and a former Norwegian underground worker who had been wounded and captured by the Germans in the final days of the war and would probably have been executed but for the timely surrender of Germany.

My accommodation in Pembroke, comprising a small bedroom and a large living room with a coal-burning fireplace, was on the first floor of L Staircase in Ivy Court. The bedroom window faced Pembroke Street; running alongside the window, all the way down the outer wall of the building, was a drainpipe. On a cold November night, a few weeks after my arrival, I was aroused from my slumber by a tapping sound at the window, followed by a persistent whisper, 'Brian, Brian, Brian!'

Bewildered, I jumped out of bed and switched on the light. As I drew aside the curtain I was startled by the face of a student grinning up at me and saying:

'Brian, please let me in.'

Moments later, with my full cooperation, the nocturnal intruder managed to squeeze through the tiny window. After apologizing profusely for his unorthodox appearance, he retreated to his own quarters.

It quickly dawned on me that my window must have been used by enterprising students, year after year, and generation after generation, for gaining re-entry to Pembroke after the ten p.m. curfew by climbing up the drainpipe from the pavement below. Obviously, no one had thought of tipping me off concerning the critical role I was ordained to play in this historic aspect of college life. However, bent on making my mark as a Cambridge gentleman, I immediately resolved to uphold tradition by guarding the secret of the window jealously, while bracing myself for the noble task of providing indispensable assistance to unheralded visitors, if required, at all hours of the night.

My scholarship took care of my university and college fees while paying me a monthly allowance of some eighteen pounds to cover living expenses. Such an amount, despite being adjusted upwards each year to keep pace with inflation, was sufficient for my basic

wants, but little else. However my father sent both Patrick and me sixty pounds every year, a generous sum which did make a difference to our tight budgets. Once, after winning a minor sweepstake, he gave each of us an additional sixty pounds and made me feel like half a millionaire.

I wrote to my father about once every fortnight. He took a tremendous interest in anything concerning my stay at Cambridge, constantly offering me discreet encouragement while taking care never to give unsolicited advice. Although he had been away from Oxford for three full decades, England still occupied an exclusive place in his mind, as revealed in this comment from one of his letters: 'When England speaks, the whole world listens; when England turns, the whole world moves.'

Although I had to cope with an enormous amount of reading, I must have encountered far fewer difficulties than my father at Oxford, since I had at the outset a working knowledge of English. However, lacking a basic understanding of industry in general and British industry in particular, I made arrangements through the British Council to visit a number of plants in the industrial north in the summer of 1947. They included a coal mine, a heavy steel mill, a light steel factory, a cooperative printing factory (where in a fenced-off area virtually worthless paper currency was being printed for the Chinese Nationalist Government) and *The Daily Express*.

In the course of my trip I also called on fellow-Victory Scholar Noel Ho Nga Ming at Manchester University, and then crossed the stormy Irish Channel one night to spend a few days in Dublin with the Irish Jesuits. Noel joined the Hong Kong Education Department after graduation and eventually retired in the 1980s as a Deputy Director of Education.

For about three months I took elocution lessons from an elderly lady. Ever since, I have been alertly sympathetic whenever I see Eliza Doolittle in her heartbreaking efforts to grapple with the elusive vowels, on stage or on screen. My coach, who had a beautiful speaking voice, once told me that she had served in the war as a liaison officer. Many a young serviceman had tried dating her over the telephone without having met her beforehand, and on each occasion she had had to cool his ardour with the stock answer:

'I'm sorry, my dear, to have to disappoint you, but do you know that I'm almost old enough to be your grandmother?'

At Merton, Patrick was given a warm welcome by Sir John Miles and the same suite of rooms that my father had once occupied. Patrick had toyed with the idea of serving the Chinese Government

down the road, but anticipating a Chinese Communist take-over of the country, my father drew his attention to the advantages of taking up a professional career. This led to Patrick's decision to read for the degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) in two years and to spend the remaining year of his scholarship cramming for the Bar.

Patrick corresponded with my father in both English and Chinese; sometimes they even exchanged thoughts on Oxford in Chinese verse. Over his lifetime, my father wrote a great deal of Chinese poetry on a wide range of topics, such as Oxford and England, his travels in China, Chinese New Year at Shelley Street, Pak Chuen's graduation from Woolwich, and the heroic defence of Shaoguan. Thanks to my sister-in-law Norma, all my father's poems have been preserved in a private publication.

It is perhaps not generally appreciated that the monosyllables of Chinese characters are intrinsically conducive to rhyme and rhythm in traditional literary writing. This is perhaps best exemplified in the immortal *Three Hundred Tang Poems* of the Tang Dynasty (618-906), which has long been recognized as the golden age of Chinese poetry. Modelled on the regulated verse of the Tang school, my father's compositions usually consisted of four or eight seven-syllable lines, each worded in accordance with strict tonal patterns. There is in the best of his Oxford-inspired poems an abiding appeal which stems from the simplicity of the language, the brilliance of the imagery, the beauty of the cadence, and the subtlety of the sentiment. Thus, by catching evocative glimpses of Oxford and capturing wistful memories of Merton in this most elegant of Chinese art forms, he acted as an aesthetic medium between two cultures and, in my layman's opinion, achieved greatness as a poet.

One of my father's Oxford poems has been translated freely by my sister Winnie:

I see the whisp'ring trees,
And the river running by.
I see the dreaming spires
Ever reaching for the sky.

The friends I used to know
Are well aware that I'm gone.
The birds at my window,
To whom do they sing their songs?

Then was I a stranger,

Longing restlessly for home.
Now I gaze at pictures,
Through which my memories roam.

What keeps me up tonight,
Wholly lost in reverie?
The moon o'er Magdalen
Is reminiscing with me.

During vacations Patrick and I made a point of visiting each other in turn. Together, we would do our own reading; roam on foot or on bicycles over our favourite haunts; buy fruit from the market; go to the cinema; dine 'in style' at 'British Restaurants', a fancy name for municipal canteens serving utility meals at subsidized prices; and dream beautiful dreams. Once, we even conjured up the notion of one day being affluent joint owners of a classy restaurant with the name 'Rainbow Corner'!

Regarding those days, Patrick wrote to me from Hong Kong in 1990:

Sir John Miles was in his seventies when I arrived at Merton. Several tutors and members of the staff also remembered father.

I played a lot of soccer at Oxford, being a regular member of the College Team. I can recall the occasion when Sir John turned up especially to watch me play because, he said, he had never known that the Chinese also played soccer! One of my few regrets at Oxford was the fact that I had to turn down an invitation to play for the University, for fear of incurring travelling expenses which I could ill afford. On looking back I would dearly have loved to have been awarded a half-blue!

Oxford changed my whole outlook on life. The town, the University, the parks and College gardens, the tutorial system and the facilities for sports were each and every an inspiration...

I was present at Patrick's graduation at Oxford in the summer of 1948. A year later he passed both parts of his Bar examinations. Through the intervention of Arthur Walton, Patrick was granted a one-year extension to his scholarship, to enable him to do his pupillage in London. On completion of his professional training in

1950, Patrick returned to the Far East to begin his career as barrister.

With me at Cambridge was Yong Pung How, my first cousin from Kuala Lumpur. He and I had previously met as kids in the early 1930s during his first visit to Hong Kong with his parents. When our paths crossed again, Pung How, whose father had been at Emmanuel, was an Exhibitioner at Downing. He took both the Law Tripos and the LLB at the same time as Lee Kuan Yew, whom he knew well. It is a matter of historical interest that the majority of students from Malaya and Singapore went to Cambridge rather than Oxford.

Pung How and I saw each other quite often at Cambridge. Every year his parents sent Patrick and me food parcels which were very desirable gifts in the days when very strict rationing conditioned life in Britain. For instance, it was common practice to bring one's own sugar when invited by friends to tea in college. During vacations, when meals were no longer served in hall, to cook myself a simple steak would use up two whole weeks' ration of beef. However I must not give the wrong impression that I was under-nourished, still less starving, at Cambridge; the meals in college were heavenly in comparison with those at Lingnan! In fact, coming so soon after my wartime experience, the shortages and hardships bedevilling Britain did not bother me in the least, even though at one time they provoked public outcries of 'Starve with Strachey and shiver with Shinwell!', the Minister of Food and the Minister of Fuel, respectively, in the Labour Government under Atlee.

Following an outstanding multifaceted career embracing law, finance, and politics, Pung How has been Singapore's Chief Justice since 1990.

My second year began on a promising note: by invitation from Professor Robertson, I became a member of the Political Economy Club, an exclusive association founded by Keynes. But what turned out to be of lasting significance was my chance decision to apply to the Cambridge Appointments Board for employment down the road. In consequence, I went to London to be interviewed by Shell International Petroleum. The size, diversity and complexity of the Shell Group, let alone the critical role it has to play in the world economy, was more or less foreign to me. But I was not a little intrigued when the people I met at the interview displayed a keen interest in inquiring about my background and keeping track of my academic progress at Cambridge.

After moving into digs at Silver Street, right by Mill Lane, I decided one evening after hall to go boldly where I had never gone before – pub-crawling. My companion for the occasion was another member of Pembroke and no stranger to pubs.

How I took pleasure in slowly sipping my first pint of bitter, while aping the mannerisms of the seasoned drinkers crowding around the bar! But by the time I got to just the second round, my teetotalling background already began to tell – in my mood, in my speech, and in my gait. Fortunately, my sixth sense came to my rescue when I was somehow persuaded, before too long, to choose discretion over valour by cutting short my evening and heading back on my own, rather unsteadily, towards Silver Street. I lost track of time.

There were persistent knocks on the door. After a prolonged effort I opened my eyes. It was broad daylight. I raised my head with a start, and found myself lying in bed – fully clothed and still wearing my black gown. My elderly landlady was standing at the doorway and giving me a severe look of disapproval. As I dropped back on the pillow with a splitting headache and a loud groan, I heard her saying, in a clear, condescending voice:

‘Your breakfast is ready, sir.’

With a view to participating in another aspect of life at Cambridge while getting the benefit of some exercise, I decided to take up fencing. Ever since my childhood days, scenes of duels in movies like *Captain Blood*, *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *The Three Musketeers* had always fascinated me. So, after buying a foil and a wire-mesh mask, I bicycled eagerly one day to the gymnasium to start learning from the French fencing master.

It was great fun, right from the outset, going through routine drills together with other beginners: standing on guard and gripping the foil at different angles; balancing, lunging and retreating; thrusting, parrying and counterparrying. Every little movement or manoeuvre was practised over and over again by the small class of apprentices, all of whom were ever so keen on learning the basic techniques. It looked as if everyone, including myself, would stand a good chance of becoming accomplished with the foil, and perhaps graduating in due course to the sabre or the épée.

To be good at fencing naturally requires a high degree of skill and concentration, agility and energy. In a genuine contest, contrary to what is usually portrayed in movies, one simply cannot afford to mix earnest swordplay and idle banter, or allow oneself to relax or be distracted even for a fleeting moment. When serious fencing began, I was at first able to hold my own against my opponents but I

had soon to admit that my eyesight was not good enough, my reflexes not quick enough, and my stamina not strong enough for such a demanding sport. Nor was I prepared to spend too much time practising with the foil at the expense of my reading. I therefore gave up fencing, not without a touch of regret, after only two terms. Thus, any hopes I might have secretly harboured of one day becoming a Chinese Errol Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks Jr. quietly vanished.

I had two special visitors from Hong Kong. The first was Arthur Walton, on home leave at the time, who treated me to lunch at the University Arms. The second was my former French teacher, Father Albert Cooney, who dropped by while on his way back to Hong Kong from Dublin. In the decades that followed, I was able to keep in touch with him. The last of my surviving Jesuit teachers, Father Cooney finally returned to Dublin from Hong Kong in 1992, crippled by old age and infirmity. He passed away five years later.

In June 1948, at the end of my second year, my girlfriend came from Hong Kong with her parents to join me at Cambridge. I had been dating her for several months prior to my departure for England and continued my courtship by correspondence from Cambridge. As planned, we got engaged on the day we attended the May Ball at Pembroke. But disaster struck when it became increasingly apparent that we were no longer happy or comfortable in each other's company. Several weeks later, prior to her return to Hong Kong, she and I came to an agreement, after painful soul-searching on both sides, that it would be in our mutual interest to break our engagement. It is certainly not an episode that I can look back upon with too much pride or without a twinge of embarrassment.

For my final year, I stayed at digs on Brookside which runs alongside Trumpington Road (an extension of Trumpington Street); the lodgings belonged to the Christian Brothers, some of whom were undergraduates. My large bedsitter was on the ground floor; from my desk beside the bay window I could see a row of trees lining the path of a brook not far in front of me. It was in this quiet little corner that I spent much of my time preparing for the finals.

The Franciscan Friary was less than a block away. I got into the habit of dropping in at the Friary for tea with Timothy McKenzie and members of his community on the weekend. Once, while giving me some insight into a friar's life, Tim mentioned that of the three vows that he had made – poverty, chastity and obedience – the last, as far as he was concerned, was by far the most difficult to live up

to.

In due course I was called back by Shell International for more interviews, at the end of which I was asked to get in touch with them again after my finals. The likely prospect of securing employment with Shell immediately after graduation boosted my morale and helped me focus my efforts on getting a good degree.

Patrick and Simon and Lillian Li came to attend my graduation in June 1949. For their first visit to Cambridge the Lis brought along their two tiny tots, Simon Jr. and Gladys, accompanied by Ah Ping, a gentle and well-mannered servant from Hong Kong, who could not speak a word of English at the time. Simon graduated from London University a little later and was called to the Bar. He joined the Hong Kong Government as Crown Counsel, rising to the position of High Court Puisne Judge and Vice-President of the Court of Appeal at the time of his retirement in the late 1980s. He was offered, but declined, the C.B.E. Later he was appointed by the Chinese Communists to the Preparatory Committee created to advise Beijing on the transition of power in Hong Kong on July 1, 1997. As for Ah Ping, she became so fond of England that she eventually retired to Plymouth on her own, and passed away contentedly many years later in the land of her choice, without ever returning to Hong Kong. To my mind, she was quite a remarkable woman.

I did not get a first, but on the strength of my 2:1 (second class, first division) Tony Camps offered me a grant to do research at Pembroke for two years leading to another degree. At the same time Shell made me a firm offer of employment in their Hong Kong Office, following marketing training in Britain. I consulted my father, who wired an immediate reply, urging me to join Shell and predicting that 'Shell will last much longer than Hong Kong'. Much as I would have liked to have remained at Cambridge, I was not at all convinced in my mind that I had either the true vocation of a scholar or the intellectual edge to thrive in the academic profession. It was, therefore, not too difficult for me to decide in favour of Shell, accepting on trust their assurance of ample career opportunities within their worldwide organization.

While in London I seized the opportunity to go to Wimbledon, where I queued up with Simon Li on a hot, cloudless day for over two hours for standing-room tickets for the men's singles final. We stood for another three hours under the sun watching the very exciting and well-played match between Ted Shroeder and Jaroslav Drobny, which the former won in five sets. I still relish the memory of that exceptional day, sunburn and all, whenever Wimbledon

comes round each summer.

Before joining Shell I went to Norway for a holiday, flying first to Oslo and subsequently travelling north to the island of Alesund, a long way up the Norwegian coastline. There, I spent a week with Erling Ronneberg and his wife Hanna, for whom I used to babysit once in a while at Cambridge. They took me hiking with them high up in the mountains on the mainland. For three days we trudged mostly through snow-covered terrain, with Hanna leading the way at all times at a moderate pace ahead of me for my benefit and Erling following closely behind me, so that he could quickly pick me up whenever I stumbled and fell, which was quite often. For a non-sportsman like me, it was from beginning to end an exciting and unforgettable adventure. From Alesund I cruised southward along the wild and rugged coastline to Bergen and then Stavanger, where I boarded a plane for London. My Norwegian holiday is especially memorable because it turned out to be the last time that I saw or heard from the Ronnebergs.

After several weeks' training with Shell, I was soon winging my way home. But in Cairo the plane developed engine trouble, and the passengers were put up for the night at Shephard's Hotel by BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation, now British Airways). The next morning we were taken to see the Great Sphinx and the nearby pyramids. Thus, I can claim in all honesty that I once stood gazing at those inscrutable wonders, even though I can barely remember having been there! When the plane finally landed at the Kaitak Airport, I was greeted warmly by my father with a glint of pride in his eyes and a radiant smile on his face. This was quickly followed by a very happy reunion with my mother and the rest of the family at Shelley Street, which did not seem to have changed one little bit in the last three years.

Still staying with my parents at the time were my sisters Margaret, Winnie and Rosalind, and my brother P.T. I wasted little time in catching up on their latest news. Margaret was now an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong. An active member of the Catholic Action Association of Hong Kong before the war, she had gone on a Yu Pin (the first Chinese Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church) Scholarship in 1946 to the United States. This is how Margaret, writing from Vancouver in 1990, recalls that phase of her life:

I had no clear idea what I was going in for academically but, like most young people then and

now, relished the opportunity of seeing the United States. My father wanted me to go. He said I didn't look too well physically after my years in Free China and thought a change in environment would do me good.

After one term at St. Francis Girls' College in Illinois, I succeeded in getting myself transferred to Marquette University in Wisconsin, one of four American Jesuit Universities, with a strong Faculty of Journalism. At the end of three semesters, lasting twelve months, I obtained a Bachelor of Philosophy degree, majoring in Journalism and minoring in International Relations.

On my graduation from Marquette, the Dean gave me as a parting gift a photo of himself which I still keep on my shelves. He also asked if I wanted a job. I sometimes wonder what direction my life might have taken had I accepted his offer. But I was getting homesick and decided to return to Hong Kong without attending the graduation ceremony.

Back in Hong Kong I began to contact the Associated Press Office and even produced an article I had written about Korea for them to see. However, Mr. Simpson, my Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong before the war, was now Dean of Arts and acting Vice-Chancellor, as well as Professor of English. He offered me a job to teach English under him. He knew of my bent towards writing. Father was very strongly in favour of my accepting the offer. He thought an academic career was unsurpassable. On my part I had had a very happy life as a student of English and as undergraduate. Briefly before the war I had held the job of assistant to the first Dean of women undergraduates. The emotional ties to my alma mater were strong. Besides it wasn't as though I had an offer in journalism in the wings. So I began my teaching career in September 1948 which lasted for two decades until my departure for Canada in 1970.

Despite the unsettling effects of the war years, Winnie passed the School Leaving Examinations with Honours in 1946. In the following year she matriculated with three distinctions, in English,

World History and Religious Knowledge, and joined the University of Hong Kong as a Government Scholar. She now picks up the story in her letter from Detroit written in 1990:

I remember attending most of my lectures in the Tang Chi Ong School of Chinese, since that was the only building left untouched by the ravages of war. The Great Hall which had prided itself on being the centre of student life was a total wreck. This important edifice was not restored to its former glory until five years later when once again it was used for social functions and for conferring degrees.

Having benefited a great deal from my father's coaching in Chinese literature during the war, I signed up for two Chinese classes in the first year. I had Mr. Chan Kwan Po for Translation, a Marxist sympathizer, who was known for being an easy examiner. The Head of the Department of Chinese Studies was Professor Ma Kiam, a wonderful man and a good teacher.

As my degree was in Letters and Philosophy I had to take Logic, Psychology and Ethics, none of which appealed to me. However I was fortunate in having Father Cronin (my former teacher from Wah Yan), the Warden of Ricci Hall, as lecturer in Logic. Father Cronin became one of my greatest friends and his death in 1990 left a vacuum in my life.

In my second year I became a very active member of the Legion of Mary. The 'Legionnaires' congregated at Ricci Hall for meetings and social gatherings. From this group I made lifelong friends. Today, some forty years later, we are still in contact, and although scattered all over the world, we can always count on hearing from each other at Christmas time.

In my third year I became the Honorary Secretary of the Arts Association and the first Chairman of the new-found History Society. I was also enrolled as a member of the Literary Club; sometimes I would walk away from the monthly meetings held at Lugard Hall wishing I were a budding Jane Austen or Charles Dickens. In my fourth year I was the first woman to have been elected an Independent Member

of the Students' Union.

Rosalind was in her final year at Sacred Heart School. She was also taking private lessons in drawing, which eventually led to her becoming an accomplished amateur painter.

In 1946 P.T. went to Shantou, a coastal city in Guangdong Province, to work for the China Navigation Company. With the offer of some financial help from my father, he decided to go to the United States for postgraduate studies. Through Father Ryan's recommendation, he was accepted by St. Louis University. P.T. remembers only too well leaving Hong Kong, on a shoestring budget, for the United States on Chinese New Year's Eve early in 1947. After fifteen months at St. Louis, he graduated with a MA in Economics and Corporate Finance. On his return to Hong Kong he joined the Tai Sang Bank as English Secretary. He was about to marry his wartime sweetheart Wong Wai Wah. The first thing he asked me to do was to be his best man at the wedding.

All in all, how sweet and mellow were the fruits of peace, coming so soon after the trials and tribulations of war!

CHAPTER 14

My Father and His Protégé, 1946-51

In the spring of 1946 my brother P.C., now a Major General, was posted to New York as Military Attaché to General Ho Ying Chin, the head of China's first military delegation to the United Nations. Anthony, his only child, continued to live with his doting grandparents at Shelley Street. It was my father's express wish that his beloved grandson, now seven years old, should be brought up and educated in Hong Kong under his charge, at least for the time being. Over the next few years my father must have given even more of his time and attention to Anthony than to any of his nine children before the war. In return Anthony learnt to love and venerate his grandfather, who became much closer to him than his own father.

Writing from the University of Chicago in 1993, Anthony recalls in intimate detail this distinctly happy phase of his life:

Grandfather used to take me to the Queen's or the King's Theatre on Saturdays, to attend the late morning show for children which always began with cartoons, followed by a western, a swashbuckling adventure or a comedy. Judging by the way my grandfather laughed and talked about the cartoons afterwards (his favourites included Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, and Yosemite Sam), I would say that the adult most certainly enjoyed the loony adventures of these uniquely American characters as much as the child. At the end of the show, when *God Save the King* blared in the house and oversized and overlapping images of the Union Jack and King George VI filled the screen, most people would stampede towards the various exits. But grandfather would stand straight up to stare reverently at the screen, his hand firmly gripping a shoulder or arm of his fidgeting grandson.

For lunch after the show, grandfather would usually take me to the little cafe on the mezzanine floor of the China Emporium, a department store on Queen's Road Central about a block away from the

two theatres. By far the favourite selection had to be cold roast beef (preferably medium rare with English mustard) accompanied by boiled potatoes and cabbage, a near perfect reminder of his Oxford days that he could never have enough of. After thus sharing his table for more than five years, I too developed a lifelong devotion to boiled potatoes and cabbage.

Sometimes grandfather would spend a Saturday afternoon with me browsing in bookshops, but only after the old man's nap. Grandfather's afternoon nap was a habitual practice that sorely tried a little boy's patience. Shortly after he had climbed into bed, I would tiptoe in to peek at him, trying to see if he was really asleep. A frantic maid would dash in and whisper fiercely that I must not wake up her master. I would slip out only to return again to the bedroom once the maid had left to attend to some household chore. This scenario would repeat itself several times before I was rewarded at last with grandfather's rising and getting dressed.

Holding me with one hand and a small basket with the other, grandfather would walk down the steep slope of Shelley Street, and then through the meandering path of Hollywood Road, a street famous for shops selling rare Chinese books as well as modern publications, stationery, brushes, ink-stands and other accouterments of traditional Chinese literati. I was then a faithful devotee of martial-arts pot-boilers, and in one of these shops I would head straight for the section holding the latest offerings. As I pored over the volumes, grandfather would stand near the shop entrance and chat amiably with a salesman or the proprietor. After satisfying myself in that session of impromptu reading, I would make a selection and grandfather would then ask me whether I needed some books for serious study as well. Frequently, therefore, what landed in that little basket would be a set of kung-fu fiction and a volume of pre-modern writing – history, philosophy, or poetry. Proceeding down the street to the next shop, we would pause and I would start reading all over again.

As I now look back on the experience, what

impresses me is that never once did grandfather in any way hurry me along. He walked, he talked, and he waited – ever so patiently – in order to indulge his grandchild's fantasies that could also be, in his judgment, a mind-stretching contact with the printed page.

The book-buying excursion, like our journeys to the movie theatres, also ended almost invariably in a restaurant, one that served Chinese cuisine. On many occasions grandmother and my two youngest aunts (Winnie and Rosalind) were asked to join us for dinner. The place to which grandfather and I returned countless times to dine was Jui Heung Yuen, an unpretentious little eatery on Des Voeux Road Central, directly across from the Central Market. What attracted the two of us to this restaurant were some of the freshest and crispest roasted and barbecued meats to be found – goose, duck, squab, quail, partridge, chicken, suckling pig and ribs. Like similar shops in North America such items would be hung and displayed behind a huge, glass-panelled area at the entrance.

Whenever grandfather and I entered, Mr. Wang, a stout and amiable cutter of this restaurant, would look up – his greasy hands resting or working on top of the gigantic cutting board – and greet us loudly, 'Mr. Yu, out again with your beloved grandson! Here's a duck leg for Sonny Yu.'

On those occasions when we were walking through the streets of Hong Kong or sitting down to dine, grandfather would almost always ask me a few questions about my schoolwork or what I had covered with the tutor he had hired to coach me in the study of classical Chinese. I was urged to recount some episodes of ancient history that we had taken up in class or some passages that we had struggled to understand from the *Analects* or *Mencius*. These he would go over with me, inviting me to repeat such lessons in my own words and tell him as well how I felt about the meaning of a certain event or the moral of a particular description of the sages.

Perhaps the most lasting influence that grandfather had on me came from the conversations

we had – in a sustained manner – on Classical Chinese poetry. Grandfather himself was a poet of considerable erudition and talent. Though he wrote only one type of pre-modern lyric, the so-called regulated verse that most frequently appeared as a quatrain or an eight-line poem, each line with seven syllables, he wrote over one hundred and fifty of these. Indeed, as far back as I could remember, he was writing throughout the war years when we were travelling through several provinces in south China, often with the Japanese on our heels. After we returned to Hong Kong, his compositions were set down with great regularity.

Usually after dinner, with a freshly-lit cigarette firmly tucked in his holder, its smoke mingling with the steam rising from the tea in a partially-covered porcelain cup nestled in an old silver stand, grandfather would sit at his huge wooden desk. I would frequently take up a position standing behind his left shoulder so that I could peer directly at the pad on which he would scribble a few lines of almost illegible characters.

After the initial jottings, grandfather would puff on his cigarette, sometimes for quite a few minutes, before setting down more lines until a good portion of the poem or its entirety had been finished. As he stared intently on his creation, almost invariably the process of revision would begin as well – the crossing out of a word or phrase, the substitution of a word here and there, whole lines cut up and re-arranged, more alternate lines or phrasings wedged between the lines and in the top or bottom margins. There were times when the page would be virtually covered by what to unfamiliar eyes had to be incomprehensible blotches and scrawls.

If he could not quite finish what he wanted to do in one evening, grandfather would slide his pad carefully into the desk's top right drawer for work to be resumed a day or two later. If a poem materialized to his liking, he would take a fresh sheet and copy the finished product, often chanting the lines softly as he wrote. Knowing that I had been a constant observer of both his work and its fruition, he would make

them the subject of our conversations when we were alone together.

Did you understand why I chose that word and not the one I first set down, that rhyme and not this one, he would ask. Have you observed how I phrased an allusion, a very familiar one about the general who stood on the wall while his troops surrendered to his enemies? Can you guess why I used an inverted construction in this line? These are two strange-looking words that actually mean soccer, a version of which the Chinese had begun to play during the eleventh century. Isn't the term particularly appropriate for this poem about Oxford, where your uncle Patrick is playing on the Merton team? Can you tell that this is an echo of Yuan Mei's line, or Li Bo's phrase in his poem that you just memorized for class?

Instead of lecturing me on theories and precepts or burdening me with daunting exercises, grandfather, I realized years later, was teaching me how to write Chinese verse in the most indirect, intimate and enjoyable manner possible. Indeed I was privileged to see how he went about creating those compositions, all of which I have since committed to memory. His discourse on poetry and poetics taught me a great deal as well about the long literary history of China and many of its canonical figures.

Did grandfather plan it that way? Did he somehow expect me to take up a vocation that would in some way reflect and extend the experience of those years immediately after the war? I don't know. Soon after our separation, when I left for Taiwan with my parents, I began writing the first halting lines of Classical verse of my own. Every sample I mailed to him thereafter, until he was too ill to read and write, always met in return the most generous encouragement and praise from him.

I wish he could read some of what I wrote since then. I wish he knew as well that I now have the opportunity to lecture occasionally a class on Classic Chinese lyric and share with my students here many of the things he once shared with me. I hope he is pleased that I have kept what he had given me – part

of himself.

My father retired in 1951, the year Anthony left Hong Kong to rejoin his parents in Taiwan and attend the Taipei American School. Before long my father was repeatedly hospitalized on account of a serious liver infection, originating from the dysentery suffered during the war. When he eventually recovered, he looked noticeably older and careworn and was quite unable to regain his former buoyancy of spirit.

After selling the Shelley Street home, my parents moved into 9 York Road in Kowloon Tong. Nestling in a quiet upper-class neighbourhood, the quaint little two-storey home with a tiny patch of garden was protected on all sides by a high boundary wall, an ideal choice for retirement. There, they welcomed back Anthony with open arms when the high school graduate returned to Hong Kong in 1956 to see his grandparents before leaving for higher education in the United States.

‘Sometime during our last days together,’ Anthony reminisces, ‘grandfather charged me to think seriously about a life of scholarship. That sowed the seeds of my vocation.’

Shortly before Anthony sailed from Hong Kong, my father took him back to Jui Heung Yuen for their last dinner together. There were just the two of them. As my father haltingly bade his beloved protégé Godspeed, memories of happier times crowded in upon him, and he was visibly overcome with emotion.

CHAPTER 15

Hong Kong, 1949-57

On July 1, 1997, after 155 years of British rule, Hong Kong was formally handed back to China in a dignified and solemn ceremony attended by the President and the Prime Minister of China and by the Prince of Wales, the British Prime Minister and the Governor of Hong Kong. In the years leading up to this truly historic event, the Hong Kong Government had been steadily sending home their very many British expatriate staff, including top officials, and replacing them with Chinese civil servants. In keeping with the times, British and foreign firms in Hong Kong had also been scrambling for Chinese talent and moving them rapidly up the promotion ladder to the highest echelons of their organization.

In 1985 a measure of democracy was introduced when some members of the Legislative Council were elected for the first time in the history of the Crown Colony. With the arrival in 1992 of Chris Patten, the twenty-eighth and last Governor, the pace of change in Hong Kong was accelerated. In 1993 a Chinese civil servant, Mrs. Anson Chan, broke a significant expatriate barrier by becoming Chief Secretary (formerly Colonial Secretary). Two years later, despite objections from Beijing, elections were held to fill all the seats in the Legislative Council, and the Democratic Party, led by Martin Lee, a famous barrister (and one of my little pupils in Free China), won the most seats.

Let me now paint a somewhat different picture of Hong Kong before the Second World War. It can best be described, in a nutshell, as a model Crown Colony. The Governor was appointed by London and supported by an Executive Council and a Legislative Council, neither of which was elected. Among those who sat on the two councils were a few hand-picked wealthy Chinese with business interests who could be counted on to say and do nothing that might rock the boat of the establishment.

The million or more people of Hong Kong, predominantly Cantonese from Guangdong Province, were law-abiding, peace-loving, politically inert, and self-satisfied with being left alone by the government to mind their own business. By and large, they must have ranked among the most compliant, the most complaisant, and the least troublesome of the innumerable colonial subjects in the vast

British Empire.

As for the British expatriates who prided themselves on taking up 'the white man's burden', they constituted the numerically-small, highly-paid ruling class in Hong Kong and usually behaved as such. They were the mandarins in government and the taipans of well-established business concerns which were household words (such as Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Asiatic Petroleum Company of Hong Kong, Jardine, Matheson and Co., and Butterfield and Swire), and which symbolized British success and eminence in the midst of peace and prosperity. As a rule expatriates resided in the exclusive Peak area, away from the local inhabitants. A constant reminder of the snobbery and racial discrimination pervading colonial British circles was the barring of all Chinese, irrespective of background and education, from membership in the Hong Kong Club, the prestigious hub of upper class expatriate society. (It was not until the 1960s that the decision was finally taken to abolish this colour bar and admit the first few Chinese, myself included, as Club members.)

In this connection, Jan Morris went so far as to make this startling assertion in *Farewell The Trumpets*:

The British residents of Hong Kong genuinely, without affectation, thought of Chinese as foreigners in the Colony, and themselves as true natives.

Be that as it may, few would disagree that, whether in the public or private sector, virtually all management, professional and supervisory positions of any importance had traditionally been held by and earmarked for expatriates. There was no room for local talent in the order of things, and little cause or desire for change. After the Japanese surrender, British expatriates flocked back to Hong Kong to resume their gilded careers, and the status quo of the colonial power structure remained seemingly untouched and unchallenged.

It was against this background that Shell International broke with tradition by assigning me to the Asiatic Petroleum Company of Hong Kong (APC, later renamed Shell Company of Hong Kong) and starting me off fair and square on an open-ended career. Precisely on my twenty-fifth birthday, eight years to the day after the landing of the Canadian troops in Hong Kong, I joined APC as the first local staff to have been recruited direct from Cambridge. Not a few eyebrows were raised when, as a newcomer with no knowledge of the market and hardly any practical experience, I was immediately

put in charge of a Sales Section in the Marketing Department, as if I were an expatriate from England.

Like any raw recruit, I would have had an awkward time handling my job at the outset if a seasoned salesman had not been discreetly placed under my notional supervision, whose unwritten duty it was to familiarize me with the market, act as my guide, and caution me against making a fool of myself. There was a popular Shell story, often quoted by old China hands, about a frantic telegram dispatched from the Shanghai Office to London, in the days before the Second World War: 'Market share falling. Send two more Oxbridge blues.'

Even though I was not a Cambridge blue and could do nothing to improve market share, I somehow managed to survive my initial appointment.

Meanwhile, away from the office, things of greater moment were engaging my urgent attention. One day, at my sister Winnie's birthday party, I was amazed to find myself the lone male guest among a crowd of women undergraduates from the University of Hong Kong. To Winnie's lasting credit, her single-minded attempt at indiscriminate matchmaking on my behalf was to have far-reaching consequences. It was at the party that I first met Mamie, and from that day on my fate was sealed.

A swimming 'green' at the University of Hong Kong, Mamie Leung Oi Mui was the champion free-style swimmer in the Colony in 1947/1949, during which she set many records. At the Annual Hong Kong-Manila Interport Meet in 1948 and 1949 respectively, she won gold in several events. She was the winner of the Annual Cross-Harbour Race in October 1949 in the record time of 28 minutes and 12 seconds. In the same year the University of Hong Kong presented her with a special silver trophy in recognition of her outstanding achievements in swimming.

Despite being a poor swimmer who did not know how to dive, who could barely do the breast-stroke, and who had a constitutional fear of the sea, I recklessly defied the odds by dating Mamie. I also indulged in teasing her with a steady stream of little notes that were lightly sprinkled with humour and sentiment. Before long, it was no secret that my undisguised attentions did not go unheeded, and my unconcealed partiality was neither unfelt nor unwelcome. Fortune often favours the brave.

In 1950 Mamie graduated with a BA in Economics and was immediately appointed Mistress of Form 5 (equivalent to Grade 12), in Sacred Heart School, her alma mater, teaching, not Economics,

but English, History and Domestic Science.

On Saturday, September 15, 1951, which happened to fall on the Mid-Autumn Festival, Mamie and I were married in the Roman Catholic Cathedral on Caine Road. Father Sheridan, my former teacher from Wah Yan, officiated at the wedding. My best man was none other than my old pal from Lingnan, David Cheung, and the bridesmaid was my wartime pupil, Marion Lee, a daughter of former Lieutenant General Lee Yin Woh.

I was surprised, but did not complain, when Shell raised my salary substantially as a married man and paid my honeymoon fare to Japan, special benefits to which local staff were not normally entitled.

The day after the wedding, there appeared in *The Sunday Herald* a large picture of the lovely bride under a conspicuous heading 'Mamie Leung Weds'. Only in a tiny footnote was bare mention made of my name. However, this should not be misconstrued as a mortifying experience for the bridegroom, since even John F. Kennedy saw fit to introduce himself at a press conference as the man who accompanied Jacqueline to Paris.

From Mother Wilhemina, a Canossian nun and her former piano teacher, Mamie received a short but beautifully handwritten letter which ended on this personal note: 'You must always remember, dear Mamie, that when you are married, your responsibilities are doubled and your privileges halved.' To young lovers of my generation, it came across as a piece of timeless advice.

We set sail for Japan in a calm and glowing sunset. But hours after leaving Hong Kong we ran straight into a typhoon. For two or three days the boat went round in circles, battered and tossed hither and thither by raging winds and giant waves. Such were the conditions on board that it would have been madness for us to venture beyond the confines of the cabin, and a steady diet of seasick pills became the order of the day. Indeed, the first seventy-two hours of our honeymoon turned out to be even more exhausting than I could have expected or imagined!

On arrival at Yokohama, we were met by friends and driven to Tokyo. On the way, almost every building, every kind of construction and every form of vegetation on either side of the highway had been flattened by saturation bombing; charred rubble and ruins were just about the only things that came into view. I very much doubt if anyone in 1951 could have foreseen that Japan would rise from the ashes to become, all too soon, an economic superpower.

What impressed us so much during our stay in Japan was the

cleanliness, courtesy, orderliness and gentle dignity of the people we met everywhere – in busy Tokyo and peaceful Kyoto, in crowded subway stations and at remote bus stops, in department stores and souvenir stalls, in hotels and coffee shops. It is the stuff that great nations are made of. But what a stark contrast to the arrogance, brutality and ruthlessness of their warrior countrymen in the Second World War!

As soon as we got home, we were thrilled, to say the least, to discover that we had won a minor sweepstake worth about HK\$10,000, equivalent to several times my monthly salary. So, with unexpected cash in the bank and rose-coloured views of the future, we began our partnership in high spirits. For our first home, we rented a tiny two-bedroom apartment on the top floor of an unexceptional three-storey house at 1 Blue Pool Road, within walking distance of the race course in Happy Valley.

A year later, Mamie gave birth in St. Paul's Hospital to a daughter, whom we named Teresa, after one of my favourite saints, Thérèse of Lisieux, the 'Little Flower of Jesus'. In keeping with family tradition I asked my father to give the baby a Chinese name. He called her 'Chung Kay', after an ancient celebrity reputed to have a good ear for music; it was my father's subtle wish that Teresa would hear his silent message and bring a brother into the family! On the heels of this happy event, luck once more came our way when we won another sweepstake of similar value.

In 1954, a Marian Year in the Catholic calendar, I was on my way to London for training when I broke my journey in Rome especially to visit St. Peter's Basilica. While standing in front of St. Peter's statue, whose feet are touched by innumerable pilgrims and tourists year after year, I made a personal promise: our next baby, if a boy, would be named after St. Peter, and if a girl, Marian. As things turned out, Marian was born in 1955, also in St. Paul's Hospital. My parents were naturally delighted to have another grandchild, but would probably have been even happier if it had been a grandson. However, my fair-minded father gallantly named the baby 'Yiu Mei', meaning 'shining pillar', taken from a gracious Chinese couplet hailing a daughter at birth as a future pillar of the family.

I worked with Shell Hong Kong for over seven years, in the course of which I was reassigned every year or two from one Sales Section to another. This was, of course, intended to broaden my experience through exposure to new situations and changing responsibilities and to keep me constantly on my toes. But life in

Shell was anything but 'all work and no play'. There were Shell parties up the Peak, staff functions in honour of long service employees and visiting VIPs, Chinese dinners with agents and dealers, seven-a-side soccer matches between Head Office and Kuntong Installation, and mah-jong games with my Chinese colleagues.

The name Dick Frost conjures up delightful memories of those early days of my career. An old China hand, he was the General Manager with whom I got on marvellously. One day he called me into his office, saying that he wanted me to meet a VIP. Standing stiffly beside Dick's desk, with the upper part of his body leaning a little awkwardly forward and his feet kept firmly apart, was a friendly-looking Englishman in his forties. He turned out to be, of all people, Douglas Bader – the legendary legless pilot who had commanded the first Canadian Fighter Squadron in the Second World War and who had won the DSO and DFC with bars, the Légion d'honneur and the Croix de Guerre. The three of us were chatting amicably when a tailor was ushered into the room. Thereupon, without any break in the conversation, the war hero slowly eased himself onto a comfortable sitting position on the corner of the desk, methodically unstrapped his artificial legs, casually took off his trousers and then gently handed them to the poor tailor who looked utterly dumbfounded.

Dick was not only my favourite General Manager, but also the most popular among both staff and agents. He stood out in his peer group by virtue of his shrewd business sense, his warm and colourful personality, and his unfeigned interest in meeting Chinese people from all walks of life. He took obvious and justifiable pride in his ability to speak Cantonese fluently and with the right intonation, largely as a result of a childhood spent in south China. As a matter of fact, I have never come across another foreigner who could engage in Cantonese conversation as well as he did. Remarkably, he could even play with panache a popular Chinese finger game, which requires each of the two contestants to throw out one or more fingers with one hand and simultaneously guess aloud – in a split second – the total number of fingers shown by both parties. At Shell social functions, Dick never failed to wow Chinese agents and staff alike by rattling off different numbers, loudly, rapidly, and confidently in flawless Cantonese jargon without any trace of accent and, more often than not, by beating his challengers at the game.

Dick left Hong Kong on retirement early in 1957, but not before he had finalized plans for my transfer to Malaya.

CHAPTER 16

Ipoh, 1957-59

When I first learnt of my posting to Malaya as the District Manager of Ipoh, I had to look at a map to find out the whereabouts of my next home. As the new assignment would be for one year only, I flirted briefly with the idea of going to Ipoh on my own, on the assumption that it would probably be less troublesome for Mamie to remain behind in Hong Kong with the two small children. But Mick Eliot, the Personnel and Public Affairs Manager of Shell Hong Kong, urged me to do otherwise, as he had seen so many marriages falling apart after unhappy separations on account of Shell. Heeding his advice I quickly changed my mind, and Mamie needed little persuasion to arrive at the conclusion that we should make the move together to Ipoh.

In April 1957 we sailed into Singapore, where we were accommodated by Shell in the landmark Raffles Hotel, named after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the colonial governor and founder of Singapore, who had first raised the British flag on the island on February 6, 1819. How times had changed since August 1946 when my brother Patrick and I, en route to England, were held up in Singapore for three weeks and, for lack of money, had little option but to spend the nights sleeping on canvas beds at the back of a Chinese shop that was affiliated with a Hong Kong acquaintance!

A few days later we flew to Ipoh, the capital of Perak State, about 500 kilometres north of Singapore. We could not have arrived in Malaya at a more opportune time. The local Chinese Communists, who since 1948 had been operating from jungle camps, attacking lonely police stations and the bungalows of European planters and miners, and committing murders at random (one of the victims being the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Guerney), had been virtually eliminated. On August 31, 1957, a bright new era in the country's history began when Britain formally granted independence to the Federation of Malaya, comprising the nine Malay States and the British Settlements of Penang and Malacca. (Malaysia, a federation of Malaya, Singapore and the former British colonies of Sarawak and Sabah, did not come into being until September 1963. Singapore left Malaysia and became independent in 1965).

Perak is the largest of the western Malayan states, having an

area of some 20,500 square kilometres. At the time its population amounted to less than 1.5 million, comprising 44% Chinese, 40% Malays and 15% Indians. Ipoh dates from the nineteenth century; in 1957 it had the spacious rectangular layout of a modern pioneer town and some 130,000 inhabitants. Since Perak, like the rest of Malaya, lies just north of the equator, its climate is characterized by uniformly high temperatures through the year, with a mean of 27 degrees Celsius.

Ipoh was a milestone in my career. Under the Shell International staffing system, I was the first 'regional staff' to be cross-posted within South-East Asia and the first Chinese Ipoh District Manager. It was also the first of exactly half a dozen geographic moves that spanned my entire career.

I was exceptionally fortunate with the Shell residence at 6 St. Helen's Gardens in Ipoh. The large Colonial-style two-storey house stood in the middle of a two-acre lot dotted with trees, in a secluded and picturesque neighbourhood. Separate servants' quarters were located unobtrusively in the immediate vicinity. An impressive driveway ran in a huge circle through the estate, under the imposing front porch of the house and right round the buildings. A well-trimmed, waist-high hedge traced the dividing line between the estate and the adjoining racecourse. I was provided with a Ford, a chauffeur and two gardeners. Thus, I lived in style as the Shell District Manager. Small wonder that Mick Eliot in Hong Kong had alluded to Ipoh as a plum job!

My territory followed the boundary of Perak, the economy of which was dependent first and foremost on tin-mining, and to a lesser extent on rubber estates and coconut plantations. In point of fact, the flat alluvial plain around Ipoh produced more than half of Malaya's tin output, making Ipoh effectively the tin-mining capital of the country. I was supported by two Area Assistants and a total staff of about twenty, all of Chinese stock and speaking English, Malay and one of two Chinese dialects (Cantonese or Hokkien). My immediate boss, the expatriate North Malaya Branch Manager, being some two hundred kilometres away in Penang, I was afforded complete freedom from day-to-day interference and ample scope for independent action. Mine was, indeed, the kind of junior managerial job that many an aspiring young Shell professional would often dream about.

As District Manager, far from being desk-bound and tied down to a regular office schedule, I had to make frequent business trips up and down Perak, often staying one or more nights away from home. It was such a blessing to have my chauffeur Abdullah – who knew

the territory like the back of his hand – to drive me everywhere I went. As I gradually became familiar with the geography of Perak, I also tried to be on the lookout for things of local interest that would normally escape the notice of a casual visitor. Once I was journeying in a little boat well after dark, in a remote place called Sitiawan, when I set eyes on hundreds, if not thousands, of fireflies glowing brightly like Tinkerbelle above the nearby bushes along the river bank and swarming over the boat as it went by. It was pure magic!

To complicate my life as a foreigner, Shell Malaya made it mandatory for all non-Malay staff to pass oral and written examinations in Level One Malay. None of my staff took the requirements at all seriously, having spoken Malay from childhood; few of them, however, could spell, let alone write, the language correctly. For my part, I had to learn from scratch by mimicking colloquial Malay and memorizing very simple texts. In the event, although all my staff did well in spoken Malay as expected, just about every one of them failed the written test. I somehow managed to scrape through both tests at my first attempt, thereby obtaining a certificate for ‘proficiency’ in Level One Malay ahead of the others. In a friendly, sarcastic vein, my loyal staff immediately dubbed me a ‘genius’, if only to rub in the fact that I was quite incapable of carrying on even a simple conversation in broken Malay.

I had an unusual bit of luck when I persuaded a Shell agent to employ young women, on a trial basis, as pump island attendants at his service station. The idea of creating job opportunities for women in retail outlets had probably never before been mooted, let alone put into practice, by Shell or any of its competitors in Malaya or Singapore. In due course two young, good-looking and well-trained female attendants, wearing bright red blouses and blue jeans, made their first appearance at the Shell Brewster Road Service Station, in the heart of Ipoh. By proving themselves to be no less competent and hard-working than their male counterparts, only more sprightly and genial, they had little difficulty in gaining customers’ outright favour and earning their keep. News of the successful pilot scheme went round the small world of Shell agents, some of whom wasted little time in following suit. Soon there were female attendants on duty at other Shell stations, not only in the Ipoh area, but also elsewhere in Perak.

As a follow-up to this satisfying experience, I decided to organize a beauty contest at the Annual Shell Dinner for agents and dealers. All the twenty or more female attendants were invited to participate in the competition, wearing Shell uniform. Every agent

and dealer at the party was duly informed that he would be asked to cast his vote for whomsoever he considered to be the prettiest contestant on the stage. Having already met all the competitors, I was prepared to bet my bottom dollar that the winner would be found among three very attractive girls employed at Ipoh stations.

When the votes were counted, I could hardly believe my eyes when a girl with a plain face, a rotund figure and an awkward gait from Sitiawan easily won the most votes and was declared the Shell beauty queen. But the penny dropped when it was whispered about that the Sitiawan agent had bribed many of his cohorts with cartons of cigarettes and also promises of free dinners in exchange for votes for his pet attendant. Thus ended my first – and last – attempt at engineering a free election. To conclude this little tale I was touched when, at the end of my time in Ipoh, I received, as a parting gift, a group photograph of five smart-looking girls in Shell uniform, bearing their good wishes and signatures.

It did not take Shell long to decide to leave me in Ipoh for at least another year. This made it possible for my parents to visit us in 1958, at the time of the Mid-Autumn Festival. This being the first (and only) time that my parents ever went on vacation together, we particularly wanted to do our best to make them feel at home at St. Helen's Gardens. For nearly a month my parents were pampered by Mamie and charmed by the two grandchildren's affectionate, playful ways. Friends and neighbours were invited to meet my parents at a cocktail party. We took them to the races; on other Saturdays the whole family gathered beside the fence at the edge of the lawn, every now and then, to watch the horses galloping by, with our dachshund 'Sukey' at our heels barking indignantly at the hooved intruders. We were so happy and content to be together that when the time came for my parents to leave, the goodbyes were said with real regret.

The Ipoh Club, famous for its Long Bar, was easily the favourite watering-place for thirsty managers of commercial firms, tin mines, rubber estates and other business concerns. Like my predecessors, I made a point of parking myself there virtually every Saturday afternoon, either direct from the office or on my way back from outstation travel. It was a civilized way of keeping abreast of market news and gossip and promoting business contacts on first-name terms. It was also customary for anyone having one more drink before leaving to raise his glass and cry out aloud: 'Satu, Empat, Jalan.'

That well-known, overworked phrase is in fact an abomination of spoken Malay, meaning literally 'one, four, road' – in other

words, one for the road! Sometimes I would be driven home rather the worse for wear, badly needing a nap to recover from too many 'Satu, Empat, Jalan'.

In the spring of 1959, in the wake of the usual happy-go-lucky Saturday session at the Club, the alarming discovery was made that I was suffering from a severe bleeding ulcer. In consequence, I spent two weeks in hospital and another two at home. There would be no more 'Satu, Empat, Jalan' on my weekly agenda for quite some time to come.

During my convalescence I read a collection of Somerset Maugham's short stories written before the First World War. It was of particular interest to me that some of his tales of expatriates, living strange lives in exotic places in colonial Malaya, seemed to mirror some of the odd characters and situations I myself had come across in Perak.

While we were on leave in Hong Kong, our holiday spirit was dampened by the news that my mother-in-law had to undergo cancer surgery. When it was time for me to return to Malaya, Mamie had to stay behind with the children for obvious reasons. For a month I lived by myself in the big house at St. Helen's Gardens, which at night was all too empty and much too quiet. I had to be content with having Churchill for company as I reread his memoirs of the Second World War. When the plane carrying Mamie and Teresa and Marian touched down in Kuala Lumpur, I was waiting impatiently at the airport to welcome back my three darlings with my eager embrace and take them home on the long drive back to Ipoh.

CHAPTER 17

London, 1959-60

I had for some time been hoping for an opportunity to work in the Shell Head Office in London, an experience essential to my upward mobility within the Group. Was I excited when I learnt that I was to work in London for a year as an economist! Then came an urgent request for advancing the date of my arrival in England, which inflated my expectations and led me to presume that I was urgently needed.

We arrived in London in October 1959, shortly after the General Election which had returned Harold Macmillan and his Conservative Government to power. At the time Greater London, with an area of 1,610 sq.km. and a population of about eight million, comprised the City and 32 London boroughs, of which 12 are classified as inner London boroughs and 20 as outer London boroughs.

The very next morning I reported for duty at St. Helen's Court, trim and fresh, ready for a quick start, and determined to make a tremendous early impression. The first to greet me was a sweet little lady personnel assistant who light-heartedly said: 'I'm afraid there has been some misunderstanding. We don't even have an office for you yet. Why don't you take a few days off to show your family around London, and then come back sometime next week.'

My ego abruptly deflated, I floated gently back to earth. Accordingly, I changed tack by taking the family to the West End to see June Bronhill in *The Merry Widow*, which has since then become my favourite operetta, and Alec Clunes in *My Fair Lady*, which brought me back to my painstaking elocution lessons at Cambridge. Needless to say, there were plenty of pleasant diversions in London to keep the family interested, excited and happy.

Our Shell flat in Teddington, in the outskirts of London, was definitely not anything to rave about. Located at 43 Broom Road, May Place was a draughty old house divided into five self-contained units, two on each of the two main floors, and one up in the attic.

Ours was the attic flat, cold, dark and gloomy, accessible only by means of an outdoor staircase, a fire-escape in reality, leaning against the side of the building. There were two bedrooms and a living room, with only one kerosine heater to keep us warm. As the weather got colder, I managed to get a second one from Shell, but

only after some good-humoured pleading and wrangling. Even then, it meant that the heaters had to be moved day and night from one room to another, as needed. Looking back, I simply cannot understand why I never thought of simply buying a couple of electric heaters to provide much-needed warmth and comfort for the family!

And for communication with the outside world, the Shell families living in May Place had to walk to a public telephone several minutes away. Months later, following requests and protests to Shell, a public telephone booth was finally installed in the hallway on the main floor. But still no private telephone!

Teresa and Marian attended a convent school not far from May Place. As the weeks sped by, it was so gratifying to hear them picking up little by little an English accent. Marian, who was not yet five, was already wearing glasses. At Guy's Hospital, it was brought to our attention that she had a weak eye which needed correction. In order to force that eye to work harder, the good eye had to be covered up. So, whether at home, at school or in public, little Marian had to put up with the embarrassment and awkwardness of wearing an unsightly patch over one eye. But she patiently went about carrying her little burden day after day with hardly a whimper of complaint or protest.

The Shell Head Office network was focussed on St. Helen's Court, Bishopsgate, in the City next door to Liverpool Street Station. There were in fact some thirty-four separate locations scattered in the vicinity, mainly in Finsbury Circus, also by Liverpool St., which gave staff splendid opportunities to get lost in pubs, bookshops, etc., while in transit between departments. That was some years before all the offices were brought under one roof in the new Shell Centre which is by Waterloo Station.

My office happened to be in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Building, an aging structure with little to commend itself, located near Bank Station. Every morning I had to catch a train from Hampton Wick, near Teddington, to Waterloo, and then complete the journey by underground. I remember going to work as an unconventional and odd-looking Chinese by wearing a bowler hat and carrying an umbrella. For the first six months I was attached to the Economics Division where I was given the opportunity to develop a feel for how the huge and complex Head Office organization operated in relation to its numerous overseas companies. But my subsequent assignment in another division was not very helpful.

All in all, our year in England has left us with many enduring memories. We saw the sights and heard the sounds at various

historic places in and around London, such as Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tower of London, Windsor Castle, and Hampton Court. We were dazzled by pomp and circumstance at the dress rehearsal for Trooping the Colour on the Queen's Birthday. We went to the theatre, attended concerts, spent an afternoon at Wimbledon, travelled as often as time would allow, and got in touch with friends from the past.

Timothy McKenzie, my Franciscan friend came and joined us for Christmas at May Place. We had brief reunions with Martin and Diana Knowles and also Geoff and Taffy Smith, all friends from Shell Malaya. We spent a week-end with Dick Frost and his wife Pat in their retirement home in Bournemouth; Dick even brought us morning tea while we were still in bed. We visited Wilf Saunders, my Cambridge classmate, and his wife Joan in Sheffield, and they came to us with their two boys for a week-end in Teddington. We had lunch with Timothy at the Franciscan Friary in Buckingham. Naturally we went to Cambridge, where I realized my student's dream of staying at the charming Garden House Hotel right by the Backs. We had a happy time walking through Pembroke and along the Backs, lunching with Father Gilbey, the aging chaplain, and having tea with Tony Camps and his wife. Nor did I forget to take the family to Oxford, especially to see Merton College.

Then came the highlight of the year. With Tony Hudson, my Pembroke contemporary, for company, we went on a coach tour on the Continent, in the course of which we spent six delightful days in Interlaken, sailing in calm and sunny weather in each of the two lovely lakes, Brienz and Thun, making the spectacular journey by rail up the snow-clad Jungfrau, riding in chair-lifts, dropping into souvenir shops, and relaxing in sidewalk cafes. Tony even gallantly babysat for us on the odd evening.

On our return from the Continent I was all too aware, with mixed feelings, that our time in England was rapidly coming to an end. On the completion of my year in London, I had to attend a management course at the Shell Training Centre in Teddington, as a stepping stone to yet another tour of duty in Malaya. This made it necessary for Mamie to fly to Hong Kong with the children. Unfortunately, as a result of the flight home, Mamie suffered a miscarriage. Immediately after training I hurried back to Hong Kong for Christmas and home leave before taking on my next assignment.

CHAPTER 18

Kuala Lumpur, 1961

Early in 1961 I arrived in Kuala Lumpur with my family to assume the post of Commercial Manager in the Head Office of Shell Malaya.

Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federation of Malaya, lies in the state of Selangor. At the time its population numbered some 300,000. Kuala Lumpur was a mixture of ultramodern architecture and traditional Chinese shop houses. Notable buildings were the government offices and the railway station, all somewhat Moorish in design. The city was a hub for rail, road and air communications within the states of Malaya.

After spending the first two weeks in the new Merlin Hotel we moved into a Shell bungalow at 21 Kenny Road, in a suburban area. Thus, we began another phase of our life together in an equatorial climate, which did not particularly appeal to either Mamie or me.

Among the first things I did was to visit the four Shell District Offices, namely, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and, of course, Ipoh. This was intended to obtain a preliminary overview of the market and get a little acquainted with each and everyone of the District Managers with whom I shared overlapping responsibilities.

While I was still feeling my way at work, I began taking golf lessons, only to find that I had very little aptitude for swinging the club and hitting the ball, still less sending it far afield and in the intended direction. After a few frustrating weeks, I made up my mind that golf was definitely not my cup of tea.

I was playing with Teresa and Marian at home one Sunday afternoon when the telephone rang. A nurse from the British Military Hospital said in a very friendly voice, 'Mr. Yu, congratulations! Your wife has given birth to a son.' On hearing the happy news the two girls, who had been hoping for a brother, were literally jumping up and down with loud screams of joy.

The baby was baptized Peter Timothy, after the First Apostle in accordance with the promise I had made in St. Peter's Basilica, and my Franciscan friend from Pembroke. In response to my request for a Chinese name for his new grandson, my father sent me this note: "Your cheerful telegram arrived last evening. We asked Winnie to wire you in reply and to inform you the Chinese name for your baby

is 'Kwok Wai'. Mother is very happy with the news. Again we congratulate you."

The last of the letters he wrote me over the years, whenever I was away from Hong Kong, and the only one I still have in my safe keeping, it is rich in memories.

Then came an unexpected signal from London that I would soon be transferred back to Hong Kong. Consequently I was sent to Singapore to attend an Industrial Relations Course. Any disappointment I might have felt over leaving Kuala Lumpur all too soon, without making any mark, was more than offset by the very pleasant prospect of playing on home ground again, after an absence of five years.

CHAPTER 19

Scaling the Heights, 1962-66

At the time of my return to Hong Kong, a census taken in 1961 indicated that its population was 3,133,131 or roughly double what it was in 1946. A combination of factors had contributed to this remarkable development, namely, the mass influx of refugees from the mainland, free trade, low taxation, flourishing private enterprise and, beyond question, good and stable government coupled with the rule of law. As a matter of fact, the population was to double again by the time Hong Kong was handed back to Communist China in 1997.

We moved into a rented apartment at 3E Robinson Road, on the 10th floor of a new block of flats directly overlooking Wah Yan College and the harbour. Teresa and Marian went to Maryknoll Sisters' School on Blue Pool Road, near our former home. As they knew very little written Chinese, they took French as their second language.

I rejoined Shell Hong Kong in April 1962 as the first non-expatriate Personnel and Public Affairs Manager, one of four senior managers reporting to the General Manager. For the next several years I served in turn under four General Managers. I was given free rein to discharge my responsibilities as I saw them, without fear or favour. It was to be the most eventful and the most satisfying phase of my career.

Unfortunately I got off to a rotten start when, in my first month on the job, I suddenly collapsed in the office one morning and was rushed to hospital once again with a bleeding ulcer. It was indeed very frustrating to find myself condemned to a month of inactivity at the beginning of a new and promising assignment.

On my return to work, I had to lead a fairly large party on a trip to Brunei (lying between the Malayan states of Sarawak and Sabah, on the northern shores of Borneo) as guests of Shell Brunei. Among the group were Professor Davies, Head of the Geography Department at the University of Hong Kong, and a number of media representatives. This expedition had been planned by my predecessor Sweeney Todd with a view to promoting public awareness in Hong Kong of that tiny oil-rich British protectorate (since 1984 an independent state) in which Shell International had a

huge vested interest (and the Sultan of which is still regarded as one of the wealthiest men in the world).

The day before the scheduled departure, Hong Kong was hard hit by a typhoon. In the chaotic aftermath, I missed our flight. Consequently I arrived in Brunei all by myself, a day late. Imagine my embarrassment when, wearing the credentials of the new Shell Public Relations Manager, I finally caught up with the party I was supposed to lead!

For my part, the truly memorable part of the Brunei experience was not the humdrum conducted tour of the oil field and refinery, but the long trip up a river in a small flotilla of canoes, in order to meet aborigines in their natural habitat. On arrival at the native village, we were greeted right at the landing place with all due ceremonial by a tall, brown chieftain in loincloth, who looked like a magnificent specimen of Tarzan. Standing in festive mood behind him were his four smiling Janes, all wearing colourful sarongs and barebreasted for the occasion. The chieftain was holding in one hand a live chicken and, in the other, a long knife. As a customary sign of welcome, he proceeded to slash the throat of the chicken with aplomb and then handed everyone in the party a glass of native drink. Mindful of the need to show our gallant host every respect and courtesy, all of us immediately gulped down the potent offering of friendship and hospitality. Perhaps it is just as well that I forgot what dinner was like that evening, but I do recall spending a most unusual night on the floor of a typical large and rectangular longhouse – a tribal communal thatched dwelling raised on stilts – side by side with several native families.

Wearing my personnel hat I decided, as a matter of priority, to provide better health care for the seven hundred-odd local staff and their families. Under the existing Shell Medical Plan, all medical and hospitalization expenses were paid for by the company. However there was only one doctor on contract to attend to Shell patients, and his clinic was located in Shell House in the Central District. Due partly to the constraints of time and distance and partly to lack of confidence in the doctor himself, Shell employees based at the four field locations – one on the island and three in Kowloon – seldom went to the clinic, preferring to obtain medical attention elsewhere when needed, despite having to pay out of their own pockets.

In order to improve on the plan, I signed up three more doctors (including a famous practitioner and surgeon, Dr. Timothy Kong) with clinics in different parts of Hong Kong. Thus, employees and their families now had a choice of going to their preferred doctor or to the most convenient clinic. The new arrangements went over

extremely well, as reflected in the notable increase in the total number of Shell patients receiving treatment from the company doctors and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from every single location, including Shell House.

In time I also succeeded in upgrading benefit plans relating to sick leave, maternity leave, vacation and, most importantly, retirement for all local staff. There was an inevitable increase in manpower costs accruing from all these improvements, but it was readily accepted by the General Manager, Chris Robertson, as a sound investment in employee welfare and morale. A Shell Housing Loan Plan was introduced whereby, through a Shell guarantee, senior staff could obtain a housing loan at a reduced rate of interest from the Chartered Bank, up to the amount of the Shell Provident Fund held by the company in their accounts. Steps were also taken to ensure that the Shell pay scale was highly competitive in the local job market, especially in comparison with that of our main competitors, namely, Mobil and Texaco.

With regard to the career development of senior staff, not too many of them had university degrees, professional qualifications, or management potential. Something had to be done if Shell's intention to replace expatriates with local talent was to be translated into tangible results. I therefore made sustained efforts from year to year to attract new recruits with good qualifications and high potential. After my time with Shell Hong Kong, some of them eventually made their way into senior management positions.

By way of comparison, the remuneration and benefits package for Shell expatriate staff serving anywhere overseas was determined centrally by the London Head Office. It was considerably richer and more comprehensive than what was applicable to local staff in Hong Kong or, for that matter, home staff in Britain. In this connection expatriates were required to work, often at short notice, in any of the numerous Shell companies around the world, and the best of them were assigned to one country after another and groomed, step by step, for major appointments in the huge and complex organization.

To return to public relations, I was the designated Shell spokesman in regular contact with the media, both English and Chinese. In order to promote and manifest Shell's interest in the younger generation, I established the Shell Scholarship at the University of Hong Kong. It would be awarded each year to the matriculation student (from schools participating in the competition) who would best meet the three selection criteria: academic

excellence, ability to communicate in English, and leadership potential. At HK\$6,000 per year for any four-year programme, it was the richest scholarship available at the University at the time.

In the first year of the competition (1962), the outstanding student in the judgement of the panel of senior managers, with me as chairman, was Patricia Chen. As a sign of the times, it was considered advisable to consult London before naming her the first Shell Scholar, simply because of her sex! Graduating from the University four years later, Patricia joined Shell as a Public Affairs Assistant. In the late 1960s she immigrated with her husband and son to the United States, where she died tragically in a motor accident.

Drawing a lesson from my personal experience at Cambridge, I made a Shell donation to the University of Hong Kong for setting up an Appointments Service in October 1963. This was meant to induce and encourage British and foreign concerns as well as the Hong Kong Government to provide more and better job opportunities for local graduates. In May 1966, when it was decided by the University to establish a separate policy-making Appointments Board, I was invited by the Vice-Chancellor, Ken Robinson, to serve as its first Chairman. In the following year, I acted as chairman of an ad hoc committee with a mandate to create a parallel Appointments Board and Appointments Service at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (founded in 1963), at the request of Dr. Li Choh Ming, the Vice-Chancellor.

The Crew Department of Shell Hong Kong, which was responsible for the recruitment and administration of Chinese crew members on behalf of Shell tankers, was run by an expatriate, Bernard Philpot, who came within my jurisdiction. It was in this connection that I served as an ex officio member of the Board of Governors of the Hong Kong Sea School, a charity organization which trained boys from poor families for a vocation at sea and in which Shell and other foreign firms had a direct interest.

During those crowded years, I was appointed by the Governor, Sir David Trench, to serve more or less concurrently on the Civil Service Commission (now Public Service Commission), the Labour Advisory Board, and the Supervisory Board of the Hong Kong Urban Life Survey. At one time I chaired the Personnel Management Committee of the Hong Kong Management Association.

As is generally known, anyone who wants to get on, let alone go far, in Hong Kong cannot possibly escape the hectic pace of its social life, and I was no exception. As far as Mamie and I were concerned, there were too many parties and functions to attend, too

much superficial association with mere acquaintances, and too little time for the family. Eventually, when Fate intervened and goaded us into cutting loose from the land of our birth, we were not at all sorry to leave the glitter and glamour of Hong Kong's lifestyle behind.

But there was one particular Shell-related activity that was dear to me. Of the many perquisites enjoyed by senior management, the launch picnics on board the *Tai Mo Shan* during the long summer months were hard to beat. This large vessel normally operated on company business during weekdays between the Head Office and two field locations in different parts of the harbour. On Sunday it was reserved for the personal use of the General Manager; the four senior managers took turns to use it every Saturday afternoon. About once a month, I was able to mix business with pleasure by entertaining on behalf of Shell and also taking my family along.

There was, however, a sad story related to the *Tai Mo Shan*. In the late nineteen-sixties, shortly after my departure from Hong Kong, a newly-arrived expatriate from England was scuba-diving while his wife and kids were on board the launch. Tragically, he failed to surface. His body was recovered a few hours later. How cruelly ironic it was that this bright young man should have been plucked from relative obscurity in the London office for an attractive overseas assignment, only to meet a sad and untimely end in the cruel sea!

I was obviously pleased when Shell decided to give me the benefit of free housing. In consequence we moved into a luxury apartment in Fontana Gardens, in the Causeway Bay area. I was also not unaware that I was being groomed to be the next Sales Manager (and Deputy General Manager), a logical step in my career development. With this in view and with Mamie's reluctant agreement, I made arrangements for all our children to attend boarding schools in England in the foreseeable future.

One day I was about to fly to Taiwan on business for the first time when my unfriendly ulcer once more began bleeding, only more profusely. By the time I arrived in hospital I was writhing in distress, and it was quickly determined that my blood count had fallen to a dangerously low level. While I was being given an urgent blood transfusion, I detected a grave look of concern on the face of the doctor and felt Mamie's comforting hand in mine. Eventually I had to undergo major surgery.

During my convalescence John Lyell, the General Manager, came to see me at home. Before he left, he told me candidly that, on account of the state of my health, my next promotion would have to be delayed. But what really mattered, thanks to Providence and Dr.

Timothy Kong, was that the operation was a complete success. Later, no longer hampered by health concerns, I was free to act boldly and decisively when confronted with the whirlwind forces of sudden and unforeseen change.

CHAPTER 20

'Goodbye, Father', 1966

While I was engrossed in climbing the Shell ladder, my brothers and sisters were branching out in various directions.

Subsequent to Mao Zedong's sweeping victory in China, P.C. rejoined the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan to continue his military career. In time he served as Garrison Commander, Chinmen Tao (Quemoy); Chief of Staff to President Chiang Kai Shek; and Commandant, Combined Armed Forces University in Taipei.

P.T. left Tai Sang Bank, where he was underpaid and underutilized, to teach first at Wah Yan and then King's College. This is how Mrs. Kathleen Blackburn, writing from New Zealand in 1996, remembers him as a fellow teacher: 'Although circumstances rather than a sense of vocation had led him to teaching, he was a gifted teacher, a dedicated professional, serious about work and brilliantly successful in it, on both the personal and academic levels.'

After a couple of years at King's, P.T. decided to reach out for a better future by becoming articled to a law firm, Zimmern and Partners. In 1955 he went to London to sit for the solicitor's examinations, with the help of an unconditional interest-free loan of HK\$50,000 from Mr. Siu Man Cheuk, a close friend and bridge partner. However P.T. insisted on giving Mr. Siu a postdated cheque for the amount, over the latter's protest, as a 'personal guarantee'. After passing all the required examinations, he returned to Hong Kong in 1956 and was made an assistant at Zimmern's. Fuelled by charisma, his career took off like a rocket. A partner at Zimmern's by 1959, he moved on in 1965 to head a new firm jointly with two new partners, and Yung, Yu and Yuen was an immediate success.

In due course P.T. went to Mr. Siu's office to repay the loan. Over a cup of coffee, Mr. Siu accepted the repayment with gracious words, moved over to his desk to open a drawer and, with a friendly grin, handed back to P.T. the same cheque that had previously been left with him. Thereupon, P.T. discovered that the cheque had not been signed!

From Oxford Patrick went to Kuala Lumpur to work in Shook Lin and Bok, a law firm of which Yong Shook Lin, my cousin Pung How's father, was the senior partner. On his return to Hong Kong in

1951, he made history in the Legal Department by becoming the first Chinese Crown Counsel. He married Lucia Fung, his girlfriend from Kuala Lumpur. A year later he went into private practice and, by winning a string of difficult cases which were the talk of the town, he soared into prominence, excited the imagination of the public and went on to become one of the best-known and most-admired barristers in his time. Overnight Patrick Yu Shuk Siu became a household name. Fact is sometimes stranger than fiction. In the giddy early days of Patrick's outstanding career, it was not uncommon for pretty young women to swarm around me in open admiration and for stern-looking policemen to salute me smartly in public. I could not help being very pleased with myself until I painfully realized one day that I was being mistaken for Patrick.

In the early postwar years Sheung Woon started teaching at the Yan Pak School, founded by Y.P. Law and, following his death, took over as Headmistress. When the Maryknoll Fathers established the first Government-subsidized co-educational school in Hong Kong in 1957, they made her an offer she could not refuse, that of being the School's first principal, even though she was not a Catholic. Under her direction, Maryknoll Fathers' School gained steadily in academic standing and public recognition.

Josephine emigrated from Hong Kong in 1959 with her husband and three children to the United States and settled in San Francisco, where she taught at St. Cornelius College for the rest of her working life.

Margaret's teaching career at the University of Hong Kong was punctuated by her three trips to Britain: in 1950 on a British Council Scholarship to study for a diploma at Edinburgh University, in 1957 on a study-leave grant to do research at Southampton University, and in 1964 on an Inter-University Council Grant for Commonwealth Interchange to do research at University College, London. On two occasions, she was the first non-expatriate Acting Head of the Department of English.

When Winnie graduated with a BA in 1951, she was awarded another Government Scholarship to study for a Diploma in Education at the University of Hong Kong. She began her teaching career at Sacred Heart School in 1952. Two years later she married Dr. Peter Wong. They had five children.

Rosalind began working in Hong Kong as a secretary for Lo and Lo, a law firm. On her own initiative, she went to the United States in 1952 to study at Marygrove College, Michigan, with the help of a half-scholarship and by working part-time. After graduating with a BA in French, Spanish and English, she married Robert Dewey, her

American boyfriend, with the unqualified blessings of my parents. They settled in Michigan where she began her teaching career and where their three children were born.

By and large, the comings and goings of the children did much to gladden the hearts of my parents in their twilight years.

When my parents moved from Shelley Street to 9 York Road in Kowloon Tong in 1954, they thought it would be for good. But they were given quite a scare two years later when pro-Nationalist and pro-Communist mobs clashed in various parts of Hong Kong, seriously disrupting traffic between the Island and Kowloon. For two or three days my parents were isolated from their children, all of whom lived on the Island. With this unpleasant experience in the back of their mind, my parents eventually moved back to the Island, to live at 91 Robinson Road. But my father's choice of the three-storey house, which boasted an unobstructed view of the harbour from the top floor, turned out to be less than fortunate. As his health deteriorated, it became increasingly difficult for him to negotiate the two flights of stairs. Consequently, my parents went to live in an apartment on Conduit Road.

One day in 1962, my father asked Mamie to write out a cheque for him. When he sat down at the desk with pen in hand, he was at a loss to put his signature on the cheque and, despite repeated attempts, only managed to produce doodles. After many agonizing moments he gave up the struggle, tore up the cheque and, with a blank stare, moved away from the desk in stunned silence. He had completely forgotten how to sign his own name. Alas! it was the beginning of his mental decline at the age of seventy-one.

I was with my parents one afternoon when the telephone rang. The servant Ah Fung, who for decades had been working for my fourth grandmother, anxiously informed me that her mistress had suddenly lost consciousness. I immediately sent for a doctor to meet me at my grandmother's apartment.

On learning that my grandmother had but hours to live, I rushed to the Roman Catholic Cathedral nearby and asked the Italian priest who answered the bell to come and baptize my grandmother. I was shocked when he refused outright on the grounds that she had had no religious instruction, and even went so far as to accuse me of merely seeking a Catholic burial for the sake of convenience. Incensed at the attitude of the churlish, hair-splitting priest, I lost my cool. Pointing a finger at him, I shouted angrily:

'If you don't come at once to baptize my grandmother, I'll

baptize her myself with tap water. But I dare you to face God on Judgment Day over your objections!’

To my astonishment, he quickly changed his mind and complied with my request.

My fourth grandmother was a tragic victim of the society into which she was born. A quiet and self-effacing girl from a poor family, she became my grandfather's third concubine at the age of sixteen and lost her husband at seventeen. For as long as I can remember, she lived a lonely and austere widow's life with Ah Fung, her loyal servant and sole companion, with whom she shared a measure of happiness. She was wholly dependent for survival on a meagre allowance from my grandfather's legacy; in her last years, her circumstances improved somewhat with financial help from P.T., Patrick and me. From year to year there was little, if anything, for her to look forward to with a great sense of hope or to look back on with a real feeling of satisfaction. The only joy she knew came from those occasions when she joined my parents for dinner or a game of mah-jong, or when she was with my parents' children. Her few luxuries in life were an occasional glass of ordinary Chinese wine and infrequent visits to the Cantonese opera with either my mother or Ah Fung.

She and I were born on the same day of the lunar year, the 20th day of the 10th moon. I remember well how she used to remind me of her favourite Chinese maxim: 'Those who are contented, though poor, will still be happy. Those who are greedy, though rich, will always find cause for worry.'

Fate denied my fourth grandmother beauty and talent, robbed her of her youth, and confined her to a life without means and meaning. But she meekly accepted the harshness and unfairness of her lot, harbouring neither grudge nor envy and, in solitude and contentment, found dignity and peace.

In 1963 Patrick flew Anthony from the United States back to Hong Kong so that grandfather and grandson could be together again, if only for a little while. Now in his mid-twenties, Anthony was a tall and handsome scholar with two degrees, a BA from Houghton College, New York, majoring in English and History, and a Bachelor of Sacred Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. Even though my father's mind was apt to wander at times, it took nothing away from the joyful reunion with his blossoming young protégé. It was almost like old times. At the end of his stay Anthony decided to slip away quietly without even saying farewell, for fear that the frail old man might find their final

parting too painful to bear.

My parents moved for the last time into an apartment on the first floor at 111 Robinson Road, for the convenience of being near to P.T. and his family, who were living in the same block. With each passing year, my parents drew even closer to each other and it was as amusing as it was touching to watch my mother making a fuss, day after day, over my father's well-being, particularly on trifling matters of diet. Though a year older than my father, my mother by then had the benefit of a much tougher constitution.

My father had long since stopped smoking and, perhaps unwisely, given up bridge and mah-jong altogether. Burdened with a gradually failing mind, he tried to persevere in browsing through newspapers and following the news on television. Documentaries about the Second World War were his favourite television programmes, especially those episodes directly involving Churchill, who had always been associated in my father's mind with his days in England. While watching the solemn state funeral of Churchill in January 1965, my father, seemingly in a trance, suddenly burst into tears.

As he approached the end of his life, my father became bedridden. Taking a cue from some of the children, my mother decided to get baptized and had my father received into the Catholic Church as well. But by that time he was probably unable to recognize anyone around him. My mother hardly ever left his side, whether at home or in hospital.

My father passed away on October 24, 1966. His final moments at St. Paul's Hospital are still fresh in my memory. It was mid-morning. My sister-in-law Norma, Mamie and I happened to be the only people in attendance at the time. Norma was kneeling beside my father, firmly grasping his hand and praying aloud. Mamie was standing with her head bowed at the foot of the bed. I bent down to kiss my father on the forehead and whispered, 'Goodbye, father.' Soon afterwards my mother and other members of the family arrived. Shedding silent tears, my mother was relieved, like the rest of us, that my father's sufferings were finally over.

At the funeral, on a sunny and sultry day, a huge crowd gathered to pay my father their last respects. Among the mourners were many Chinese teachers, including some who had known him from the outset of his career. They came from schools all over Hong Kong to honour the memory of the man who, in an era of instability, turmoil and conflict in China, had proudly borne aloft the torch of Chinese learning in the British Colony.

I treasure the memory of my father as a gentle pioneer who

showed his children the way from east to west and altered the course of our family history. Although he began life as a traditional scholar steeped in the past, he looked to the future and went in search of new frontiers. He graduated from Oxford against heavy odds and came home with a broadened outlook and a heightened sense of values. In a society too often preoccupied with worldly pursuits, he did his very best for the children by extending their intellectual and cultural horizons and, thereby, left behind a priceless and enduring legacy.

Eight of the nine children graduated from university, including one from Oxford and two from Cambridge. The eldest son became a professional soldier, the other three a solicitor, a barrister and a business administrator respectively, all but the youngest having served in the Second World War.

When P.C. passed away in Taipei in 1982, he was given a state funeral by the President of Taiwan, Chiang Ching Kuo. In 1994 Patrick was voted a Life Member of the Hong Kong Bar Association, one of only three lawyers until then to have been so highly honoured. In December 1998 the University of Hong Kong conferred on Patrick an Honorary Fellowship in recognition of his invaluable service to the community and, in particular, the important part he played in the establishment of the Faculty of Law at the University.

Without exception, the five daughters pursued a career in education; one of them had also served in the war. Sheung Woon was awarded the M.B.E. in 1971 during the term of Sir David Trench as Governor of Hong Kong. Both Winnie and Rosalind obtained a Master of Arts degree later in their careers, the former in Pastoral Ministry, and the latter in French, English and Education.

Six of the children immigrated to North America, three daughters to the United States and two daughters and one son to Canada.

There are twenty-six grandchildren, of whom fourteen are American citizens, four Canadian, three British, one Australian and four Chinese (Hong Kong). I would like to single out three of the grandchildren for mention.

Anthony is Carl Darling Buck Distinguished Service Professor in Humanities at the University of Chicago. In 1993 the University of Chicago published Anthony's four-volume translation of *Hsi Yu Chi* (*The Journey to the West*), one of the most beloved classics of Chinese literature. Written late in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the marvellous tale recounts the sixteen-year pilgrimage of a famous monk Hsuan-tsang (596-664), who journeyed to India with four

animal disciples in quest of Buddhist scriptures. Those who are captivated by the fantastic exploits of the hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings* may well be interested in reading the amazing adventures of the motley group in *The Journey to the West*.

It had taken Anthony thirteen years to complete the translation of *Hsi Yu Chi*. In the acknowledgements, he wrote:

As I bring this lengthy project to its completion, it is fitting for me to pay tribute to my grandfather, who first introduced me to the wonders of this tale. It was he who, amidst the terrors of the Sino-Japanese War, gave himself unsparingly to teaching me Classical Chinese and English. By precept and example he sought to impart to a young boy his enduring love of literatures east and west. He did not labour in vain.

In 1996 the Lingnan College of Hong Kong conferred on Anthony the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature.

Magdalene So, the eldest child of my sister Josephine, was a member of the U.S. delegation that went to Paris in 1982 to celebrate the centenary celebration of the birth of Louis Pasteur at the Pasteur Institute. She is currently Professor and Chairman of Microbiology and Immunology at Oregon Health Sciences University.

Denis, the eldest of Patrick's four children, who is practising as a barrister in Hong Kong, followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather by taking his degree at Merton in the 1970s, thus continuing an Oxford connection which, perhaps, no other Chinese family has yet attained and which, indeed, would have made my father especially happy and proud.

My mother surprised everyone by the way in which she stoically got over the loss of her lifelong partner and companion and swiftly adapted to the life of a widow. Her children's fears that she might go to pieces proved to be totally unfounded. No longer tied down by her ailing husband, my mother quietly resumed doing the simple things in life she enjoyed most, such as entertaining or visiting friends and relatives, dining out and playing mah-jong. Sometime after my father's death she flew to Taipei in the company of my aunt from Kuala Lumpur, Mrs. Yong, to visit P.C. and Norma. On one occasion, with Sheung Woon as interpreter, she had as her luncheon guest at home Lady Trench, the wife of the Governor! But it was

plain for all to see that she was happiest whenever she had some of her children and grandchildren for company. Guided by instinct, she made all the right moves to earn her place as the beloved matriarch and conscience of the family.

CHAPTER 21

Watershed, 1967-68

After my father's death, Mamie and I felt we could do with a change of pace and environment. So we returned to Japan for our second honeymoon. The country had indeed been transformed since our previous visit in 1951. The scars of war had completely disappeared. There were abundant signs of spectacular economic growth and surging prosperity. Tokyo was in a festive and colourful mood. Strangely enough, what could be heard booming from loudspeakers in restaurants and department stores was not the unfamiliar sounds of Japanese music, but the mellow voice of Bing Crosby crooning *White Christmas* and other yule-tide melodies! And we cannot but remember the exceptionally smooth and quiet ride in the luxurious bullet-train, the first of its kind in the world.

In the spring of 1967 BOAC launched its inaugural flight from Sydney to San Francisco. To provide fanfare for the occasion, a number of leading firms in Hong Kong, including Shell, were invited to send representatives as guests of BOAC to participate in the event. Consequently, I found myself having a wonderful time in places I had never been to but had often wanted to see: Sydney, Fiji, Honolulu, San Francisco and Lake Tahoe. Needless to say, it was a journey scrupulously undertaken, from beginning to end, for the good of Shell! After a happy reunion with my sister Josephine and her family in San Francisco, I returned home with rather favourable first impressions of what little I saw of the United States, blissfully unaware that I was fast approaching a watershed in my life.

At the time, the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69 was plunging China into anarchy and, suddenly, some of its effects spilled over to Hong Kong. In May 1967, what seems to have started as an orderly industrial strike turned ugly when violent anti-British demonstrations and riots, instigated, manipulated and directed by the local Communists, broke out and continued week after week for many months. A secret weapon, so to speak, was put to sinister use by the agitators when there appeared in the busy streets of Hong Kong, daily and mysteriously, odd-looking parcels, each bearing an ominous red flag. They were home-made bombs, some real, some fake, all intended to hurt and frighten pedestrians and motorists alike, disrupt traffic, and create chaos and panic.

But the people of Hong Kong refused to be cowed. A Chinese reporter with a flair for metaphors dubbed the deadly packages 'pineapples'. Overnight it became fashionable at all levels of society to laugh away the daily crop of 'pineapples', notwithstanding their savage mission. Unfortunately, not a few 'pineapples' did blow up, one way or another, killing and maiming adults and children alike. While trying to defuse a bomb in a shopping area in Causeway Bay, not far from my home, a British member of the bomb-disposal squad had his hands blown off; graphic pictures of the horrible tragedy subsequently appeared in at least one international magazine.

One morning, a management meeting I was attending was interrupted by the sound of multiple explosions when bombs went off near Shell House, at the intersection of Queen's Road Central and Pedder Street. On another occasion, amid wild rumours of escalating trouble, there came an announcement by the Government in early afternoon that a general curfew was about to be imposed. Shops and offices immediately closed, and people rushed home, fearing they knew not what. With my Personnel Assistant Lee Ka Tit for company, I was the last to leave Shell Head Office, after seeing to it that everyone had gone. By the time we got out of Shell House, the streets were quite deserted, but for the odd straggler. There were no cars, no buses, no trams, and no taxis. The two of us walked anxiously side by side at a quick pace, heading eastward for home. Some 'pineapples' carrying trade-mark red flags could be spotted here and there, at a street corner, on the pavement or between tramlines. From time to time, one or more police patrol cars sped by, their sirens screaming urgently to make their presence felt. It was an eerie and even frightening experience, somewhat reminiscent of wartime.

During those anxious months stringent emergency measures were taken, under the direction of the Operations Manager, Jim Rasmussen, in all Shell locations – Shell House, Kuntong Installation, and the three oil depots, two in Kowloon and one on the Island. I kept in close touch with the media on daily, if not hourly, developments. Shell was also secretly making contingency plans for the evacuation by tanker of expatriates and management personnel and their families, in case the worst came to the worst.

Heroes are often made in stormy weather. Throughout the crisis, the Hong Kong Police, led by British officers, persevered in their courageous and disciplined efforts to contain the taunting, intimidating and fanatical Communists and prevent the explosive situation from getting out of hand. But for their remarkable performance, often in the face of extreme provocation, Beijing could

well have been handed a tempting pretext for direct intervention, political or otherwise, in the affairs of Hong Kong, with immeasurable consequences. Subsequently, after law and order had been fully restored, an immense flood of voluntary donations poured into a Police Children's Education Trust Fund set up by the grateful public, in appreciation and recognition of what the Hong Kong Police had done to keep the peace in the Colony under extraordinary circumstances. My sister Sheung Woon was a member of the Committee appointed by the Governor, Sir David Trench, to oversee the handling of the fund.

As the spectre of Communism kept rearing its ugly head, news of the alarming situation in Hong Kong reverberated round the world. Out of the blue there came a letter from Leslie Barnes, my old Cambridge friend, now in Ottawa, asking if I would consider immigrating to Canada. Prompted by the spontaneous offer of assistance from an unexpected quarter, Mamie and I began giving serious thought to the kind of future we wanted for ourselves and especially for the family. We were forcibly reminded that even a first-class English education would not in itself be of real benefit to the children, if we were unable to guarantee their freedom and security in the long run. At forty-three I was not too old to look for new pastures, but I had to dig deep for courage and resolution to give up my promising stake in Shell after eighteen years and to head for uncharted territory. For her part, Mamie was more than prepared to leave behind a comfortable life in Hong Kong and rise to the challenge of emigrating to a strange country, especially if it would mean keeping the family together for a longer period.

In the past I had more or less been taking for granted that I would one day retire in England, the country that still means so much to me. But in the circumstances of 1967 I very much doubted if I stood any chance of getting accepted, in the short term, with my family as immigrants into the United Kingdom. While we were deliberating, there came welcome news that the Canadian Government had issued new criteria for accepting immigrants into the country, based on knowledge of English and French, education, work experience, age, health etc. Armed with this information, I had every reason to believe that I should not encounter too much difficulty in obtaining Canadian immigration papers for the entire family. Nor did it seem unrealistic to assume that with its democratic institutions and traditions, its vast land, its plentiful natural resources and its relatively small population, Canada has much to offer any immigrant willing and able to work for a living. Thus, with Canada uppermost in our minds, Mamie and I jointly arrived at the

momentous decision to emigrate at first opportunity, disregarding the loss of my Shell career and what that would mean in financial terms.

To complicate matters, Marian had for some time been suffering from a rare and pernicious kidney disease which, according to expert medical opinion, could sooner or later become fatal. So we had to consult with the doctors on the likely impact of the harsh Canadian winter on Marian's fragile health. However, we were relieved and encouraged when they could see no reason why Marian should be any worse off in Canada, a country known for its free and readily available first-class medical facilities.

Meanwhile my General Manager, Donald Campbell, informed me that he was sending me to London in December 1967 for training, after which I would be laterally reassigned in Shell Hong Kong as the Central Planning Manager for exactly one year. Then, beginning January 1969, I would be appointed Sales Manager (and Deputy General Manager) and, as a rare incentive, my promotion would be accompanied by terms of service which would be comparable to those of an expatriate. The exceptional offer was indeed tempting and flattering, but I had already made up my mind on strong, rational grounds to cast aside my ambition and burn my boats. I therefore confided in Donald straight away that I was seriously thinking of emigrating to Canada and that I could not be sure of how things might turn out for me in the coming months. However, I agreed to go to London for the scheduled training.

On my way to London I stopped over in Ottawa to talk things over with Leslie, who was the first Executive Director of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, a union of all professionals employed by the Federal Government. After giving me a general briefing on Canada, he immediately offered me a job in his organization. He and his wife Mary, whom I had also met at Cambridge, gave me all the encouragement and assistance I needed to make the final step to Canada. To them both, all in my family are deeply indebted for our great new life as Canadians. Since coming to Canada – the best decision Mamie and I have ever made together – we have never looked back with any regret.

On arrival in London I immediately informed Shell of my firm decision to immigrate to Canada, while not forgetting to thank them for my happy years with the organization and for their latest offer of promotion. I quickly returned to Hong Kong to tender my formal resignation as well as to apply for Canadian immigration papers. When in due course my resignation was announced most, if not all, of my friends and acquaintances in and outside of Shell were taken

completely by surprise. Strange though it may seem, it was even rumoured that I had been fired!

It was around this time that Chance entrusted me with the most exciting, and perhaps the most challenging, task of my entire career. The Dutch captain of a Shell tanker wired London that mutiny was on the verge of breaking out among the Chinese crew, all recruited by Shell Hong Kong. Following the arrival of the tanker at Bangkok, the crew were taken into custody by the Thai police. I immediately flew to Bangkok with my subordinate, Bernard Philpot, the Crew Department Manager. From the airport we went straight to the tanker to interview the captain and investigate what had happened. During the briefing, the captain accused the crew of gross insubordination bordering on mutiny and labelled them as 'communists', simply on the grounds that copies of Chairman Mao's famous Little Red Book had been found inside their lockers. It was not an entirely satisfactory or illuminating meeting. It did cross my mind that the mere presence of the Little Red Book surely could not have constituted a communist threat on board the tanker, no more than the ownership of the Bible would have turned anyone into a Christian fanatic.

Next we went to the police station where the crew members were under detention. Speaking with them at length in Cantonese I was able to ascertain, among other things, that they had genuine cause for grievance. The captain had arbitrarily marked down, in the interest of cost-cutting, the amount of overtime that had been incurred by the crew and officially ratified by the ship's officers. The crew were angry and resentful, but they had not mutinied. Furthermore, it seemed unlikely that they had had the intention, let alone the means, to engage in mutiny.

To cut the story short, I decided to assume full responsibility for the crew by taking all of them with us back to Hong Kong immediately. In view of the captain's refusal to endorse the crew's existing passbooks – a requirement absolutely essential to their continued employment at sea – I authorised Bernard to issue them with new passbooks in Hong Kong, in order to ensure their eligibility for re-employment by other tankers. Thus, by treating the crew fairly and compassionately, I was also forestalling any possible attempt by the local Communists in Hong Kong to exploit the tanker incident for their own ends, at the expense of Shell. By the time I departed for Canada, every one of the dozen or more crew members had been satisfactorily reassigned. It gives me a happy conscience to recall that the careers of those young seamen were given a second chance and Shell Hong Kong's standing as a fair and responsible

employer remained undiminished.

Disappointed with my decision to leave Shell, Donald Campbell showed little interest in seeing me in my final days in Hong Kong. But while he was away in London, Hugh Arbuthnot, the Sales Manager (and Deputy General Manager), and his wife Ann gave a farewell dinner at home for Mamie and me, to which all senior managers and their wives were invited. It was a gesture of support and understanding in unusual and stressful circumstances that was sincerely meant and, indeed, greatly appreciated.

I was the second in the family to leave Hong Kong on account of the Communist menace, my sister Winnie having emigrated to the United States with her husband and five children a few weeks earlier. In saying goodbye to my mother, I was fortunate in that I did not have to worry about her future well-being, knowing that my remaining brothers and sisters in Hong Kong would continue to take good care of her. Displaying her characteristic strength and resilience in times of change, my mother made the parting easier for herself and for me by openly sharing my ardent hopes for a brighter future for my family in a distant land. Believe it or not, the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club also came to my assistance by paying indirectly for the family's airfare to Canada, when I won a minor sweepstake for the third time!

CHAPTER 22

Ottawa, 1968-72

After the long, tedious flight across the Pacific, we landed as immigrants on March 30, 1968 at Vancouver, the scenic gateway to Canada, and broke our journey to allow time for relaxation and sightseeing. On arrival at Ottawa, we were met by a representative from the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPS) and taken to an apartment hotel in the heart of the city. As I drifted off into sleep that night, I was conscious of a profound sense of relief mingled with a strong dose of curiosity. The anxieties and pressures that had been weighing on my mind for many months through force of circumstance were now things of the past. A brand-new life, in a land of promise, free from the shadow of Communism, lay enticingly ahead, waiting to be explored.

Ottawa, a small lumbering community located near the confluence of three rivers – the Ottawa from the north-west, Gatineau from the north, and Rideau from the south – was selected in 1858 by Queen Victoria as the capital of the united province of Canada, its rival claimants being Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto and Kingston. The *British North America Act* of 1867 made Ottawa the national capital. In 1968 there were fewer than 300,000 people in Ottawa, a clean, quiet and pretty little city where traffic jams were rare (except in snowstorms) and serious crimes conspicuous by their absence.

It so happened that a political event of great moment was then taking place in Ottawa, at the leadership convention of the governing Liberal Party. On April 6 Pierre Trudeau emerged from a keen contest as the new Leader, and two weeks later succeeded Lester Pearson as Prime Minister of Canada. In the dramatic weeks leading up to the general election called for June 23, the dapper, sprightly, and charismatic new Prime Minister set about casting a spell over the entire country, from sea to sea, as he campaigned vigorously with style, eloquence and his vision of 'one Canada' against his less articulate opponent, the Progressive Conservative Leader Robert Stanfield. In consequence I, like the majority of Canadians, was swept off my feet by Trudeaumania.

Although a bystander in Canadian politics, I was only too glad to have for the first time in my life a democratically-elected Prime

Minister I could look up to and regard as my own. It was a welcome change from being a colonial subject, accustomed to accepting unquestioningly an alien ruler from another universe as the autocratic Governor of Hong Kong. Thus, I began looking forward to the time five years hence when, as a Canadian citizen, I could proudly cast my first ever political vote.

On the labour front, as in the political arena, Canada was also going through exciting times. Under Lester Pearson, the *Public Service Staff Relations Act* had been passed in 1967, granting collective bargaining rights to all categories of Federal employees and opening a new chapter in management-labour relations in the public sector. It was in this rapidly evolving milieu that I took up my appointment as Research Officer in PIPS at 786 Bronson Avenue. Formerly a professional staff association having a purely advisory and consultative role, PIPS was now a full-fledged union representing some eighteen thousand professional employees in collective bargaining and negotiation with the Treasury Board.

There were, apart from myself, seven other professional staff working under Leslie Barnes. They were all recent immigrants, including four from England, and one each from Czechoslovakia, India and Malta. They too were recruited by Leslie with an eye on the need for a good blend of academic or professional qualifications and work experience. It is testimony to Leslie's leadership and foresight that PIPS was properly staffed and well-prepared, in good time, to meet the challenge of major statutory change. With his hand at the helm, PIPS experienced little difficulty in navigating, with skill, purpose and integrity, the uncharted waters of collective bargaining in the new order of things.

On May 1 we moved into 1761 McMaster Avenue, a small but picturesque bungalow on a good-sized lot, with a giant elm tree overhanging the spacious front lawn. This was the fifth time in the last eleven years that Mamie was called upon to set up house in a different environment and under changing circumstances, a vexatious task at best. But she took the stresses and strains of the relocation to Ottawa in her stride with the surefootedness and adaptability of an experienced traveller and allowed nothing to dampen her spirits.

That same evening, as we were getting ready for dinner, the doorbell rang. A young mother was seen standing outside with a wailing baby in her arms and two little girls clinging tightly to her. Clearly they were in some kind of distress, and common sense and simple decency dictated that they should be offered immediate assistance. It also flashed across my mind that this would be a

golden opportunity for me to establish an early reputation in the neighbourhood for Oriental chivalry!

No sooner had I flung open the door than the mother spoke softly: 'I'm June Brown. We live just across the street. We saw you moving in. Please let us know if we could be of help in any way.'

The friendly gesture from a complete stranger was so unexpected that for a moment I was lost for words. All I could do was to mumble what must have sounded like an unintelligible reply. June and Merle Brown were to become our close friends. Like nearly all our neighbours in McMaster Avenue and, indeed, the majority of people in Ottawa, Merle worked for the Federal Government, the main industry and prime source of employment in the national capital.

Over the next four years, our family life at 1761 McMaster was interrupted from time to time by the arrival of a good many visitors, friends and relatives alike, from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, England and the United States. It gave us real pleasure to welcome them to our simple home and let them take a peep at our new lifestyle. How gleefully my brothers P.T. and Patrick, on separate occasions, participated with us in the seasonal rituals of mowing the lawn, raking leaves, or shovelling snow, if only with the intention of boasting about their rare accomplishment on their return to Hong Kong! Naturally, whenever possible, we would go out of our way to show visitors around Ottawa. Sometimes they would be driven to the Quebec side of the Ottawa River for lunch or tea in Kingsmere, the private retreat of former prime minister Mackenzie King and best-known landmark in the Gatineau Park, or southward to Upper Canada Village, where scenes of early life in Canada are staged every summer as a tourist attraction.

We were conveniently located for the children to attend Separate (Catholic) schools nearby. Teresa and Marian, then sixteen and thirteen, with their strong academic background, got off to a good start at Notre Dame High and Queen of Angels respectively. But little Peter, aged six, speaking hardly a word of English, was a little bewildered at first at McMaster Primary.

As for the future, sending the children to England for their education as I had previously planned was now entirely out of the question – a direct consequence of my broken career. But it was more or less taken for granted that, sooner or later, they would attend a Canadian university. It was indeed our earnest hope that they would eventually make their way in the world across Canada's multicultural society, unshackled by the past, proud of their adopted country, conscious of the riches and diversity of their acquired

heritage, and unequivocal about their Canadian identity. By the same token, we had absolutely no intention of bringing them up as half-hearted immigrants with divided loyalties.

While getting my feet wet in PIPS I was asked by Leslie to pay a quick visit to Whitehorse in the Yukon, in the north-west corner of Canada. In preparation for collective bargaining, I was to consult with nurses stationed at that designated 'isolated outpost' and find out at first hand how they felt about their terms of employment and working conditions. In lovely June weather, I left Ottawa for Edmonton, where I changed planes for the onward flight to the Yukon. By the time I landed in Whitehorse it was damp and freezing, summer having literally come and gone in a matter of hours. Unfortunately I had with me just the light summer suit I was wearing and a raincoat and, to compound my discomfort, my suitcase had been lost in transit. Cold and miserable, I made my way from the landing-strip to a motel, all the while commiserating with myself for being a victim of miscalculation and mishap.

Geographically isolated and sparsely populated, Whitehorse had one little, dusty main street with a bar or two. Under a gloomy, grey sky, there were all the makings of a sleepy, Hollywood-style watering-place for cowboys, where one would half-expect to see a John Wayne or a Clint Eastwood riding by at any moment. Thanks to rational minds, positive attitudes, and down-to-earth discussions, the meetings with nurses went well, and my fact-finding mission was accomplished without a hitch. I came away with the wonderful feeling that not too many Canadians in their lifetime would have the same opportunity as I had, so soon after arrival in Canada, of setting foot in this unusual spot with a strange-sounding name, in the back of beyond.

To mark my first business trip in Canada, I brought home token gifts for every member of the family. To Peter I proudly handed a colourful native Canadian beaded belt, confident that my clever choice would be to his liking. However, after fingering it, he looked visibly disappointed. Perplexed, I could not help asking a little impatiently:

'Don't you like this exotic native souvenir?'

He said nothing in reply, but simply pointed to the label attached to the back of the belt. It read: MADE IN HONG KONG.

As the hazy, lazy days of summer rolled by, Canadian football seemed to be on almost everyone's mind in Ottawa. Curious to find out why it was such a popular spectator sport, I took my whole family one Saturday afternoon to Lansdowne Park (now Frank Clair Stadium), to watch a match between the Ottawa Rough Riders and

the Hamilton Tiger Cats. The basic rules of the game, the different types of play, the variety of positions and roles assigned to the many players engaged in offence and defence, and the funny signals frequently flaunted by the referee, were all a mystery to us. Nonetheless, as play surged up and down the field, we threw ourselves into the spirit of the occasion by cheering and groaning with the enthusiastic, partisan crowds, even though we had very little idea what was actually going on. When the final whistle was blown, the Rough Riders were wildly applauded for their hard-earned victory while Russ Jackson, their quarterback (whatever that meant), was hailed as the conquering hero by one and all. As we chatted excitedly about the game on the way home, it was all too obvious that all of us had fallen for the Rough Riders and Canadian football.

Every weekend we would closely follow the fortunes of our team, either at Lansdowne Park or on television. Sometimes I would even take the children to watch the footballers at practice, or to the weekly 'quarterback club' meetings in the evening, to listen to spirited discussions among the coaching staff, players and fans. I also found time to study, in deadly earnest, the tactics and strategies of the game. What a fun-filled time it was when I posed as a high-powered armchair football critic, when Ottawa, coached by the low-key and phlegmatic Frank Clair, won the Grey Cup two years in a row, and when Russ Jackson was king!

For our first Christmas in Canada my mother had sent C\$10 to each of our children. At my suggestion they pooled the money to buy an artificial Christmas tree, as a souvenir of their grandmother. To this day Mamie still uses the same tree for decorating the living room every year at Christmas and for the whole family to gather round to celebrate the holy and joyous season.

Christmas Day 1968 is a day for me to remember. There had been a heavy fall of snow. It was overcast, blustery and bitterly cold. The daytime temperature went down to minus 25 degrees Celsius with a windchill equivalent of minus 58. Like a blinking idiot I deliberately went out for a walk, as if I had something to prove, not realizing that I did not have the kind of warm clothing needed to protect the body from prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures. Sure enough I felt ill that same evening and it was diagnosed the next day that I had gone down with a severe case of pneumonia. I was confined to bed for three days, during which Mamie had to watch closely over me. Never again was I to challenge the Canadian winter so foolhardily. Incidentally, two years later, in the unrelenting winter of 1970/71, we had the experience of a lifetime when 444

centimetres of snow fell in Ottawa!

The following summer, we embarked on a carefully-planned trip to see the Canadian West. After flying to Vancouver, we went the next day on the beautiful ferry trip to Vancouver Island where we visited Butchart Gardens and had English tea at the Empress Hotel. Then began the magnificent drive from Vancouver, lasting ten unforgettable days, along the trans-Canada highway, over Rogers Pass to Banff, northward to the Columbia Icefield and Jasper and, finally, back again to Banff. Time and time again, we paused and lingered at a vantage point in order to view, admire and take pictures of the snow-capped mountains, glaciers, lakes, canyons and waterfalls that are such awe-inspiring features of the Canadian Rockies. The breathtaking rides in chair-lifts and cable-cars were icing on the cake. We also indulged ourselves by staying several nights at both the Chateau Lake Louise and the Jasper Park Lodge. From Calgary we journeyed by train back to Ottawa. The flatness and monotony of the Prairies, after the spectacular landscape of the Rockies, had to be seen to be believed. There is perhaps a grain of truth in the popular banter that by standing on a sardine can in Calgary, one can almost see all the way to Winnipeg!

For a different kind of holiday experience, I took my family on a long weekend to Quebec City in search of Canada's historic past. In particular I wanted to see for myself, and point out to my children, the Plains of Abraham, the story of which had captured my imagination in class at Wah Yan College, as related earlier in Chapter 10. After taking a buggy ride around the city, we walked by the Chateau Frontenac, a massive hotel shaped something like a castle and named after Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, the illustrious son of France who had paved the way in Quebec for the eventual arrival of Montcalm. Further away we strolled in brilliant sunshine across the extensive, wind-swept Plains of Abraham, a busy playground for local families and an obvious centre of attraction for tourists. Despite the passage of time since 1759, I very much doubted if the physiognomy of this epoch-making battlefield could have undergone any real change.

In the distance we could see the mighty St. Lawrence, flowing majestically towards the far-away Atlantic. At the end of a footpath we peered cautiously over the edge of the precipice, high and daunting, which had failed to turn back the British invaders. We rambled on until we came face to face with a simple and dignified monument, on one side of which was engraved the word Wolfe and on the other Montcalm. I was reminded that it was on the Plains of Abraham that, for the first time in the long history of war, both the

commanders of the two opposing armies were killed in action. My thoughts drifted back to my school days and to Father Cronin, who had taught me that gripping history lesson about Canada, now our hearth and home.

Early in 1970 I was given the privilege of representing the Economists in the very first contract dispute between PIPS and the Treasury Board that had to be settled by binding arbitration. In my student days at Cambridge, I had paid only grudging attention to industrial relations and the finer points of mediation, conciliation and arbitration. Now I found myself diligently masterminding the case for better pay for the Economists, anxious as I was to present it in the best possible light at the hearing. In the event, the decision handed down by the Arbitration Panel amounted to annual across-the-board salary increases of 7%, 7%, and 5.5% respectively over three years. It was well received by the Economists but accepted, if I remember correctly, with a distinct lack of enthusiasm by the Treasury Board, to whom the award might have seemed more than generous. In any case, it proved to be a landmark event: the terms of the settlement virtually governed all other contracts subsequently negotiated by PIPS on behalf of other professional bargaining units, for the period in question.

After the arbitration hearing, near the end of my second year with PIPS, I crossed the floor to accept an appointment in the Personnel Policy Branch of the Treasury Board, as Head of the newly-established Evaluation Section of the Planning and Coordination Division. My office was in the Confederation Building on Parliament Hill, the home of the Houses of Parliament, a splendid group of Gothic buildings which are the crowning architectural feature of Ottawa. Working there gave me the happy illusion of being within reach of the corridors of power! The Confederation Building itself is grand and impressive, although draughty in winter and like an oven on hot summer days. From my window facing north, I had a clear view of the Ottawa River, freezing over stealthily each year as winter advanced, and thawing hesitantly in reverse direction in late spring. To those well acquainted with the Canadian winter, the river's habit of donning seasonal disguises was nothing to rave about. But to me, as yet unaccustomed to the many moods and nuances of the northern climate, it was a bewitching spectacle.

Trying to find my feet as a new civil servant in the unfamiliar setting of the leviathan Treasury Board proved to be somewhat trickier than I had anticipated; it was not unlike working in Shell Centre, London. Luckily, I had a bright and enthusiastic young

assistant, Eleanor DeWolf, she and I having first met perfunctorily as involuntary adversaries, seemingly looking with distrust at each other from opposite sides of the bargaining table. Without her thoughtful and unstinting support, the project I was working on would have been bogged down with difficulties.

As we moved through 1971 Teresa was already in her second year at Carlton University. Marian was also doing well at high school. Peter was rapidly forgetting his Cantonese. But Marian continued to be plagued by poor health, despite continuing medical attention. Eventually the experienced paediatrician looking after her recommended a young kidney specialist who boldly decided to give Marian a potent new treatment, still at the experimental stage and known to have severe side effects, which required our written consent. Many months later, when all indications pointed to her satisfactory return to normal health, Marian made a special return trip with us to the Church of St. Anne de Beaupré, near Quebec City, to offer heartfelt thanksgiving for the gracious answer to our desperate prayers. Over the past several years it had been heartbreaking at times for Mamie and me to watch Marian struggling stoically with adversity. Thank God! she was really and completely cured. Sometimes, I wonder what would have happened to her, had we not come to Canada.

In December 1971 I flew back to Hong Kong to spend a little time with my mother, who was recovering from a stroke. After my return to Ottawa, I was glancing through a journal when it caught my attention that Peter Hollis, a veteran Shell expatriate, had recently been appointed the first Employee Relations Vice-President of Shell Canada. Hollis and I had run into each other several times at Shell conferences in South-East Asia in the early 1960s. On the spur of the moment I wrote to him seeking an appointment, with a view to sounding him out on aspects of personnel management in Shell Canada which might be relevant to my project.

Within a few weeks I found myself shaking hands warmly with Hollis in his office in Toronto. I could hardly believe my ears when, without beating about the bush, he asked me what I was earning at the Treasury Board and then went on to offer me a hefty increase in salary to work for him. It was not at all easy for me, on the spot, to control, let alone hide, my joyful emotions at the sudden prospect of returning to Shell, especially on such favourable terms. But being already in my late forties, I was also a little reluctant to give up the modest pension benefits I had been building up in the last four years in Ottawa. In any case, my final decision would depend very much on Mamie's willingness to put up with the inconvenience of yet

another move, this time to Toronto. So I asked for a few days to think the matter over.

Back home the same evening, I immediately sought Mamie's reaction to the day's surprising development. Quickly she remarked:

'Brian, if you are still hesitating over the Shell offer, you must be out of your mind!'

So, without further ado, I jumped at the opportunity to rejoin Shell, leaving the future to take care of itself. Of one thing I was certain: everyone in the family was more than ready to say goodbye to Ottawa's long, hard winters.

But Ottawa could not be lightly dismissed from my memory. It was from Ottawa that Leslie Barnes extended me a spontaneous helping hand when it was most needed, and it was in Ottawa that Mamie and I ventured heart and soul upon a fresh start with the family, hoping for the best and wondering what we might find at the end of the Canadian rainbow.

CHAPTER 23

Toronto, 1972-84

Toronto is the old name the Hurons gave to their country and probably means 'land of plenty'. In 1787 the British purchased the site of Toronto, situated on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, from the Mississauga Indians and, six years later, settlement began with its establishment as the capital for the newly-formed province of Upper Canada. In 1797 the legislature met for the first time in the new capital, which was called York. At first the settlement remained a small administrative and garrison town. In 1834 York resumed its original name and was incorporated as the city of Toronto, with a population of 9,000.

In the early nineteen-seventies Metropolitan Toronto had a population of about two million and was fast becoming the leading financial, commercial and industrial centre of Canada.

Early in 1972, about a month after my happy meeting with Peter Hollis, I duly joined the Shell Canada Head Office at 505 University Avenue, in downtown Toronto, as a supernumerary in the Employee Relations (E.R.) Department. It seemed almost like a dream that I should have found my way, through a chain of fortuitous circumstances, to the Canadian wing of the very concern that had recruited me direct from Cambridge, that had set me on my feet in an exciting career, and that had been part of some of the best years of my working life. As a new immigrant, I was indeed very glad and fortunate to have had the opportunity of working in turn for PIPS and the Treasury Board and gaining Canadian experience. Now I was ready to step into the private sector and begin working for Shell Canada.

Assigned to a special project team, I was soon busy acquainting myself with the corporate personnel management network and criss-crossing the country for consultations with the many Shell E.R. Managers who were based in Montreal, Sarnia, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver as well as Toronto.

At the time I was staying in lodgings on my own since it made sense for the family to remain behind in Ottawa until the end of the school year. Before long Mamie came to spend a weekend with me, especially to look at the house at 588 Cummer Avenue which seemed to be quite a suitable home for the family. She liked what

she saw, and the purchase of the house was finalized for occupation at the end of June.

On the very day that we moved from Ottawa to Toronto, I was shocked to learn that Hollis would be returning to England at the end of his first year in Shell Canada, apparently on involuntary retirement. The news of my sponsor's sad and sudden fall from grace came as a bolt from the blue and, by blurring my immediate prospects, filled me with anxiety. But as time passed my worst fears failed to materialize. It was with a genuine sigh of relief that I learnt at Christmas of my appointment as E.R. Coordinator for Finance and Administration (F. and A.).

Moving into F. and A. at the middle-management level, as a Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong, in my late forties, with a hotchpotch of foreign and Ottawa experience, made me an atypical newcomer. I also happened to be the odd man out, in so far as the line managers I had to work with at the time were all Caucasians. Near the end of a presentation, I made a strategic pause and then said offhandedly, catching the audience by surprise:

'In case you are not aware, I often get myself into trouble, because you all seem to look alike.'

Empathetic smiles and warm chuckles immediately rippled across the large pool of friendly faces.

Before his departure, Hollis had done me another good turn by including me among the first few to be sent south of the border for T-Group Training, a form of sensitivity training already in vogue in the United States, but as yet untried and untested in Shell Canada. I was given to understand that T-Group Training had something to do with developing behavioural skills in order to work more effectively with people. In due course I went by myself to Carmel-by-the-Sea, the famous resort in California where, in the Highlands Inn, a cosy little hotel high up on a hill, I tried to pick up scraps of knowledge about the do's and don't's of being sensitive.

There were some fourteen participants, all men, in my T-Group (T merely stands for training). Thanks to judicious planning and screening by the training administration, everyone of us came from a different career background, a different organization, and a different place in North America. This was intended to create a select environment in which, as complete strangers to one another, we could speak our minds freely and take part in group dynamics at will, without being inhibited or embarrassed by the presence of someone whom we might have met before, or might well meet again in the future. Thus, we were exposed for a week to the theory and

practice of behavioural science, through informal talks and, more pointedly, by way of unstructured discussions and no-holds-barred interactive exercises.

Not knowing what to expect and opting for prudence and reticence, my T-Group got off to a slow and awkward start. But the mood and tempo changed rather dramatically when one of the participants seized an opportune moment to let off steam by talking candidly about a personal matter that had been weighing him down. Once the ice was broken, several others also got into the act by doing likewise. In the emotionally-charged atmosphere that could be discerned stealing over the group of strangers, what was aired and shared in tacit confidence dealt with strictly private concerns, such as a broken marriage, a dying spouse, and an unsuccessful career. While opening out a good deal and groping for understanding and support, one member actually broke down in tears. There came a pregnant pause during which the silence in the room was deafening. Strangely enough, after the long, unusual session, the group began interacting at a higher level of trust and gradually became a closer community, even when arguing and disagreeing over contentious issues. When it was time to part company, the participants went round shaking hands heartily with one another and exchanging fond farewells. The point was made, gently and unconsciously, that even complete strangers with little in common could find cause to be on empathetic terms, if they tried, if only for a few days.

The other types of training that I know something about, such as marketing, management, public relations and industrial relations, are entirely work-related and could hardly have any application outside the office domain. By comparison, the T-Group focusses attention on the role that behavioural skills could play in cultivating healthier and more viable personal relationships with another individual in any given situation, whether in the workplace or within the precinct of the family. In the process, it attempts on the one hand to sharpen one's awareness, and enhance one's understanding, of the way the other individual behaves; and on the other hand, to raise one's consciousness of the need at times to step back a bit, to look objectively at the manner in which one has been handling oneself, and possibly to modify one's own behaviour for the good of both parties.

There were many more who went from Shell Canada to T-Group Training, but their feedback on the experience was decidedly mixed. Some took to it, and even recommended it to their bosses or colleagues; others found some of the sessions unpleasant and disturbing, if not counter-productive. Perhaps as a result of divided

counsel, Shell Canada gradually lost interest in the T-Group as a tool for staff training and development. Later on when, in the face of a deteriorating market situation, cost-cutting measures monopolized attention within the company, 'T-Group' simply disappeared from the Shell vocabulary.

For my part an ashtray carrying the emblem of the Highlands Inn, which has been kept among my souvenirs, is a singular reminder of the time, the place and the circumstances of a refreshing learning experience.

In April 1973, after completing five years' residence in Canada, my family and I proudly took our simple oaths as new Canadian citizens. We promptly applied for, and obtained, Canadian passports, following which, as a matter of principle, we did not renew our Hong Kong British passports. The very idea of clinging to two different passports and trifling with dual nationality is repugnant to us.

Partly to celebrate our long-anticipated acquisition of Canadian citizenship and partly to court popularity at home, I made the inspired decision to treat the family to a grand European holiday. For the first leg of our journey, we flew to England in mid-August, eager to renew our acquaintance with some of London's famous landmarks and attractions. In the course of a day trip to Cambridge I did the simple thing, in glorious weather, by loitering away time in the Backs, rediscovering the joys of punting, and revelling in golden memories. To round off a great summer day, Tony Camps, now Master of Pembroke, invited us over for a drink in the Master's Lodge. Afterward, he insisted on driving us to the station to catch a train back to London. That same evening we arrived just in time at the Victoria Palace Theatre to enjoy the *Max Bygraves Show*.

From Folkstone we crossed the English Channel to Calais, the starting point of the coach tour which took us through France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, West Germany and Belgium. At the many stopovers in major cities – Paris, Lucerne, Rome, Florence, Venice, Vienna, Cologne and Brussels – we went on a variety of side-trips every one of which seemed to have something of interest and value to offer, such as a glimpse of history, a taste of culture, a sampling of local customs, or a view of magnificent scenery.

When we finally got home on the Labour Day weekend, I asked the children if they would each name one special experience which seemed most deserving of an exclusive place, like a very dear friend, in their memory. I thought it would have to be something spectacular or grand, like seeing Paris by night, or the excursion to

Versailles, or exploring St. Peter's Basilica, or the stroll through St. Mark's Square and the gondola ride in Venice, or the evening of Viennese waltzes, or the cruise on the Danube, or the drive beside the Rhine. But what a pleasant surprise when the choice fell, with one voice, on the lazy and languid punting afternoon in full view of the serene beauty and architectural splendour of Cambridge!

On Christmas Eve 1973, my mother and I were having a customary chat over the phone when she had to cut short the conversation because she was not feeling at all well. Her last words to me, spoken in a raspy voice with warmth and affection, were 'Make sure you don't catch cold! Take good care of yourself and your family.'

My mother was taken to hospital on Christmas Day. She passed away on December 29. All through the night my brothers P.T. and Patrick kept vigil beside her.

My sister Margaret, who had immigrated to Vancouver, wrote a tribute in blank verse to my mother's memory which ends as follows:

For God will have His way,
As if to say, 'You've had
Her long enough. It's time
To bid farewell.' And so
An era's past – a life
Of gentle ways, restraints,
And leisured elegance,
Beguiling an inner strength
Derived from faith imbued
By a culture due to pass
Us by – a faith that made
Her live and die by the will
Of husband, then of sons,
Assuming her children loved
Her best. In all she'd been
Rewarded, 'cause they do,
And do, and so does each
Grandchild – wherefore this day
Across the seas we kneel
In grief and pride to mourn
Her sacred memory.

My parents lie closely side by side in the Catholic Cemetery in

Happy Valley. Nearby rests my fourth grandmother. I last went there in April 1994.

On the Easter weekend following my mother's passing, I was on my way to a nursery to pick up some plants for my backyard when I noticed an 'Open House' sign outside 22 Argonne Crescent, in a quiet residential area not far from where we lived. Out of sheer curiosity I stopped my car, and dropped in for a cursory look.

The house for sale stood in a fine situation: on high ground overlooking the north, on a quiet street away from mainstream traffic, but within easy walking distance of public transport. It was well-designed, solidly built and neatly kept, with room to spare for a family of five. There was an additional source of attraction in the landscaped backyard, which adjoins St. Joseph Morrow Park, the private property of a convent. It seemed such an admirable place in which to live that I went back with Mamie repeatedly for more careful inspections. Despite its steep asking price, I simply could not keep the house off my mind.

The next week I had to attend a meeting at the Shell Data Centre with Marjorie Blackhurst, a close colleague of mine. As soon as I sat down in front of her, I burst out helplessly:

'Marjorie, I've fallen in love.'

Staring at me in shock and disbelief, her eyes as big as saucers, Marjorie uttered a loud whisper:

'Oh, no! Brian. What's going to happen to Mamie?'

I hastened to explain that the object of my reckless desire was not a pretty woman, but a lovely home.

After careful budgeting, and not a little hesitation, I finally made up my mind to put in a bid for the house. When it was accepted with little delay, my Cummer home was immediately put up for sale. But by that time the real estate market was rapidly taking a turn for the worse. Over the next two or three weeks, there were plenty of potential buyers streaming through the house, but none came back with any kind of offer.

I was becoming increasingly worried that I might have to forfeit my deposit on the prospective new home, when something remarkable happened. One night, I saw my mother in a dream: she was pacing restlessly back and forth in her bedroom at 15/17 Shelley Street, looking serious and concerned, and muttering to herself in earnest:

'I must help *number nine* (my family nickname, as I was the ninth child) sell his house.'

A day or two later there surfaced one solitary offer which happened to match the minimum price I was prepared in my mind to

accept. Thus my ardent wish to live at 22 Argonne Crescent was granted. Can I ever forget that dream?

We moved into my dream house in August 1974. There followed ten eventful years in the chronicle of the family as the children grew up and the daughters started up their own homes, while Mamie and I settled into a stable and sedate phase of our married life, free from the hassles and uncertainties arising from job change, reassignment or relocation.

Teresa and Marian graduated in turn from the University of Toronto, Teresa in French in 1974, and Marian in French and English in 1976. While working for Bell Canada, Teresa enrolled at York University for postgraduate studies, and in 1978 obtained her MBA. In the same year she married Brian Eng, her MBA classmate and a third generation Chinese Canadian from Fort Erie. My brother P.T. came from Hong Kong especially to attend the wedding. Progressing as a specialist in telecommunications, Teresa moved from Bell to the Canadian Telecommunications Group in 1981, and then to Royal Trust in 1984.

After a spell with an insurance agency, Marian joined Travellers' Insurance in 1979 as a staff writer. In 1983 she married Joseph Yao, a Systems Analyst with Shell Canada who had come to Toronto from Hong Kong via Winnipeg. At the wedding dinner, my colleague Harry Embleton proved to be a suave Master of Ceremonies. My brother Patrick, who proposed the toast to the bride, spoke so deftly off the cuff that he caused quite a stir among the guests and added a touch of class to the occasion. I followed Patrick with a little speech of my own, in which I ventured to explain how I had jotted down a number of attributes I would like to find in my prospective son-in-law, how I had them programmed into the Shell Employee Information System, how the computer had printed out a short list of people answering to those attributes, and how my attention had immediately been drawn to the first name on the list, Joseph Yao.

Later that evening I was dancing merrily with an old friend from Shell Hong Kong, when she asked,

'Brian, tell me honestly. Was that really how you got hold of your new son-in-law?'

Peter's early days in high school at Brebeuf College were marred by a serious accident. While bicycling to school, he was knocked down by a car, and was indeed fortunate to have escaped with a badly broken leg. Peter entered York University, graduating in 1984 in Economics. While looking for employment, he remained at York

for another year studying Computer Science.

Mamie and I celebrated our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1976 by driving for the first time through northern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, going as far as Bar Harbour on the Atlantic seaboard. The mere sight of gorgeous fall colours running riot on the hills and mountains and in the valleys, especially in Vermont, was so pleasing to the eye and intoxicating to the mind that we have not been able to resist the temptation to return every few years for more of the same experience. Jane Austen's view of autumn in England now comes to mind:

...that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling...

During the general election in 1979 I went to a luncheon rally in support of Trudeau, for whom my family and I had voted solidly in 1974. At this rousing assembly of loyal Liberals, he spoke without notes for half an hour on the Constitution, passionately and elegantly, proving once again that as an ad lib political speaker, he was clearly in a class of his own. After the speech I queued up for the honour of shaking hands with him. I remember saying to him, 'Prime Minister, good luck.' It was a moment of high drama in my life. Such was the sense of pride I derived from coming face to face with Trudeau and gripping him by the hand that, as I bragged to my friends later on, I took care not to wash my right hand long after the event!

I should add that I was greatly disappointed when Trudeau was humbled by the loss of that election to Joe Clark. But within months, in a bizarre turn of events, Clark's government fell unexpectedly, Trudeau readily answered the call to come out of retirement to fight yet another election and, to the absolute delight of all his fans and supporters, was triumphantly returned to power with a comfortable majority. All's well that ends well.

In 1982 Mamie and I went back to Hong Kong for a short holiday. While we were at a mah-jong party, news arrived from Taipei that my brother P.C., who had retired a few years earlier as Commandant of Taiwan's Armed Forces University, with the rank of a four-star general, had passed away. P.C. must have been one of the very few officers, if not the only one, in the Chinese Nationalist Army during the Second World War who were British-trained. In

the postwar years, he could well have been the best-educated of all Chiang Kai Shek's high-ranking officers. By sending P.C. to Cambridge, London and Woolwich, my father had laid the groundwork for the ultimate fulfilment of his eldest son's career. P.C. was fifteen years older than I. I was only three when he left for England. On his return to Hong Kong, he stayed at Shelley Street for just a short while before joining the Chinese Nationalist Army in Guangzhou. Over the years he and I saw so little of each other that I never got to know him well. But I owe him a unique debt of gratitude: but for his letter to Pembroke on my behalf, I would never have crossed the threshold of Cambridge.

In the summer of 1983, Mamie and I took off with Peter for another journey through the Canadian Rockies. Starting from Calgary, we took turns to drive as we traced a sprawling circular route by going first to Banff, then as far north as Jasper, as far west as Kamloops in British Columbia, and as far south as Waterton Park in Alberta, before finally returning to base. Pictures taken by Peter during the tremendous trip can be seen lining the shelves and covering the walls in our family room. I simply cannot imagine how anyone could ever get tired of seeing the Canadian Rockies.

When news arrived that her mother had passed away, Mamie immediately flew back for the funeral. After the untimely loss of her husband before the Second World War, my mother-in-law had brought up Mamie single-handedly in Hong Kong, in good times and in bad times, and had given her only child the benefit of a sound education as well as a devoted mother's personal attention. I think of my mother-in-law as a little heroine in her own right, unsung but not forgotten.

To return to office matters, my colleague Marjorie Blackhurst had begun her career as a clerk in the Shell Montreal Refinery and, by dint of part-time study, had subsequently earned a degree from McGill University. In 1974 she was promoted to E.R. Manager at the Shell Data Centre in Toronto, the first woman to reach the benchmark middle-management level in the history of Shell Canada. It was a major step by the company towards opening up professional career opportunities for women.

In the wake of Marjorie's achievement, I decided to stick my neck out by recommending to Shell someone I thought highly of and knew rather well. She was none other than Eleanor DeWolf, my former assistant in Ottawa, now working in a Federal department in Toronto. After a series of interviews, Eleanor was recruited in 1975 as an E.R. Staff Analyst in Shell Canada Head Office.

But doubts about the wisdom of bringing in a young woman, and a career civil servant at that, lingered in some minds. I was even given to understand that should Eleanor fail to make the grade, it would reflect adversely on me. But far from letting me down, Eleanor moved on from strength to strength. In 1981, while Shell Canada was plunged into the throes of major change, she was promoted to E.R. Manager for the Products Division, thus becoming my immediate boss and, unwittingly, saving my neck into the bargain.

In my role as E.R. Coordinator, first for F. and A., then Marketing, and later Products, I was very much involved in staff planning and development, an activity that was essential, in the Shell tradition, to both management succession planning and individual career development. At least once a year, usually at the beginning of the staff planning cycle in the fall, I would be visiting Shell locations across the country for discussions with a wide cross-section of line managers on their local staffing needs and concerns. This would lead up to the annual staff planning meetings held at various senior management levels in Head Office.

In October 1983 I took Mamie with me to Montreal, where we checked in at the Hotel Bonaventure. I was to join the Eastern Marketing Region management team at the hotel for staff planning deliberations for the next two days, while it was Mamie's intention to take a coach tour of the city and also do some shopping on her own.

Around noon the following day Mamie was returning to her room from the hotel lobby. At the moment of entry, she was suddenly shoved through the doorway from behind while an arm was wrapped tightly around her neck and a gun pressed against her temple. Resisting instinctively and, perhaps, foolhardily, she was locked in a desperate, but unequal, struggle with the intruder, a lean young man of medium height who seemed intent on punishing her for putting up a fight. Finally he decided to get away, taking her handbag and leaving her in the room, bruised and shaken, but fortunately sustaining no serious injury. By the time help arrived – much too late – Mamie had regained her poise, and it has never ceased to amaze me how she managed to remain calm and composed when recounting her terrifying experience to the police.

The very next day I drove Mamie straight back to Toronto. In the evening I was relating to Teresa the frightening sequence of events, when the pain of slowly recalling what my poor wife had gone through, coupled with the stark reminder that things could have been much worse, struck home suddenly with dreadful force.

Unable to finish the story I found myself crying aloud on Teresa's shoulder, and for the next little while, she was gently comforting, not her mother as she had originally intended, but her father instead.

A few months later Mamie's assailant was caught red-handed in another criminal act. I accompanied Mamie back to Montreal to testify at the trial. Five or six other women, who had similarly been attacked in Montreal hotels by the same man, also turned up as witnesses. Two of them had not been as lucky as Mamie: one was knocked unconscious during the assault, and the other still carried painful evidence of a serious neck injury. At the end of the trial, a detective inspector mentioned to me in passing that the culprit would probably be jailed for several years, and be out on parole after serving half the time or less.

'Of course,' he added philosophically, with a smile and a shrug, 'the cycle of crime will then begin all over again.'

Meanwhile the course of my life was being shaped, once more, by unforeseen events. For some time Shell Canada had not been performing up to expectations. Early in 1984, in a drastic move to cut costs and improve productivity, there came the stunning announcement that the company was embarking on a threefold organizational change, by restructuring, downsizing, and at the same time relocating the entire Head Office to Calgary. To this end, a golden handshake was offered to both those employees who were eligible for early retirement and to others who were unwilling to make the move to Calgary or were otherwise losing their jobs.

Eventually some six hundred employees left the company on early retirement. Although the severance package was fair and generous, many were saddened and mortified by the abruptness of the more-or-less involuntary end to their careers. Some were openly disgruntled and disillusioned. It was all the more unfortunate that, in their anxiety to press on with efforts to manage change, The Senior Executive (TSE) – the corporate title embracing the President and three Senior Vice-Presidents – betrayed a certain lack of sensitivity by electing to downgrade the sense of occasion at the time-honoured farewell parties for retirees, in whose eyes 'rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind'.

As for me, at the ripe old age of sixty, with less than thirteen years' service, I was more than content that I too would qualify for early retirement, even though I would have liked to have continued working for Shell a little longer. Certainly both Mamie and I did not have the slightest inclination to uproot ourselves again and be away from the children.

On November 30th, at the end of the day, I drifted out of the

half-deserted building at 505 University Avenue, alone, with a touch of sadness, and for the very last time. But I was not leaving empty-handed. I had been in the Toronto office for a longer unbroken period than anywhere else in my chequered career of thirty-five years. I had had an interesting and rewarding time with Shell Canada. I had met, and worked with, many fine and decent associates. I had made a number of close personal friends. I was indeed carrying away with me a bundle of happy and satisfying memories.

CHAPTER 24

The Golden Arch

It is a matter of some importance for me to step back a bit in time and recall the pre-retirement counselling programme that Mamie and I attended together for two days at the Valhalla Inn, off Highway 427, to the north of Toronto, during the final weeks of my career. The event was promoted by Shell Canada for the benefit of retiring employees and their spouses, in the hope of helping them launch out into something new and rewarding in their continuing partnership. There comes into my mind the bespectacled, soft-spoken, solemn and elderly counsellor, who said in simple language that everyone could easily understand: 'If you want a sure way of getting a quick divorce, try rearranging the crockery in the cupboard or the furniture in the living room while your wife is out shopping.'

Ever since that meaningful encounter with the wise old owl, I have been scrupulously watching my every step whenever I find myself pottering about on my own in either the kitchen or the living room. That may help to explain why, despite the relentless passage of time, Mamie and I are still happily married, untouched by any shadow of impending separation or breakup. It seems a safe bet that, with a little bit of luck, we shall be celebrating our golden wedding in 2001.

My new life with Mamie began in a spirited fashion when the children threw a party at 22 Argonne Crescent on December 1, 1984 for my retirement. There were no speeches, but plenty of goodwill, good wishes and good friends. Knowing our burgeoning taste for opera, the children also gave us season tickets to O'Keefe Centre (now Hummingbird Centre). Subsequently, we followed through by returning to O'Keefe for several more seasons. Far from becoming connoisseurs in that realm of beautiful music, we have been content with familiarizing ourselves with some of the best-known operas, collecting recordings of the world's top tenors and sopranos, and simply sitting back and enjoying the lovely arias of the great composers.

Being also very fond of musicals, we have made a point of going to most of the famous shows that come to Toronto. The one musical which has stolen my heart in recent years is undoubtedly *Les Misérables*. Suffice it to say that I have seen it seven times so far,

the last time in December 1998 with our grandchildren, Christine and Catherine.

As a carefree pensioner, unhurried by time and unfettered by schedules, I have been reading not only for pleasure but also with a view to acquiring a better appreciation of English prose and learning more about history. By and large my interests have centred on English classics (mainly 19th century), Western history (since 1500), the Second World War, and literary and political biography. I must also confess to being addicted to English authors who are household names. The reader, I suspect, can easily guess who they are. Rereading old favourites is surely one of the greatest joys that life affords. By becoming a member of The Folio Society and slowly building up a good collection of my cherished books in handsome editions, I have been indulging in the company of old friends who have shed their former shabby garments in exchange for elegant new attire. Since retirement, I have done more serious reading, and enjoyed it more, than I could have thought possible. Just for the fun of it, I have also been keeping account of virtually every book I have read.

In the first ten years of my retirement, Mamie and I did a good deal of flying across both the Pacific and the Atlantic. To begin with, we were in Hong Kong in 1985 to attend the wedding of my brother P.T.'s eldest daughter Karen and Dr. Peter Lau. The next year, we went to England in the hope of seeing Timothy McKenzie, my Franciscan friend, who was dying of cancer. Unfortunately he passed away before we arrived. In the course of a coach tour of the Lake District, we stopped off at Haworth where we spent time sauntering and loitering in the parsonage and the church of the Brontës. We got together with my other Cambridge friends: Tony Hudson and his wife Joan in Liverpool, where Tony was Dean of the Law Faculty at the University as well as a Law Professor (and also an external examiner for the University of Hong Kong); and Wilf Saunders and his wife Joan in Sawston, near Cambridge. Wilf had retired in 1982 as Professor of Librarianship and Information Science at the University of Sheffield and had been awarded the C.B.E.; subsequently, advisory and consultancy work took him to all five continents (twice to Beijing at the invitation of the Chinese government); and in 1989 the University conferred on him the honorary degree of Litt. D. We also visited Edinburgh and came away with the satisfaction of having seen Holyrood Palace and the bedroom of Mary Queen of Scots – my favourite queen, if only because of her tragic fate – as well as Edinburgh Castle.

In 1987 we were back in London for the wedding of my brother

Patrick's daughter Dominica and Trevor Yang, which took place at the Brompton Oratory. At Claridge's, I was called upon to propose the toast to the bride, and I had this to say, among other things, about the famous father of the bride:

Patrick is well-known, respected and admired not only in Hong Kong, but also in Canada. To illustrate what I mean, I will now read to you, word for word, an illuminating sketch of him in the latest edition of *Who's Who*, published by the prestigious Canadian Bar Association: 'Patrick Yu, alias Yu Shuk Siu, one of six million in Hong Kong; probably of Cantonese origin; educated somewhere in England; despite numerous prolonged appearances in court, still without any criminal record; dangerously active member of a secret Hong Kong Mah-Jong Society; last seen working furiously all night at Caesar's Palace.'

As I got into my stride, there came hoots of mischievous laughter from the large party of Patrick's ardent and loyal admirers, many of whom had come all the way from Hong Kong especially for the occasion. With such friends, who need enemies!

In 1989 Mamie and I joined P.T. in Hong Kong for his birthday. That was the time when students by the thousands began converging peacefully on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, clamouring for more freedom and demonstrating against authoritarianism. From the standpoint of the iron rulers of Beijing, the unexpected and unwelcome developments were especially embarrassing because they were being televised around the world. Back home, we watched, in horror and almost disbelief, the gruesome spectacle of tanks rumbling savagely across the Square in pursuit of the fleeing, unarmed demonstrators, soldiers firing ruthlessly at anyone within sight, and the dead and wounded being carried away on the run by their bewildered and terrified comrades. It is a moot point whether any of those responsible for the massacre on June 4 would ever admit the error of their ways. But the memory of the Tiananmen martyrs, who stirred the conscience and soul of Chinese in Hong Kong and elsewhere and won universal sympathy and admiration, will surely live on in the lofty pages of history, long after the perpetrators of the heinous crime have been forgotten. They did not die in vain.

By coincidence, it was shortly after the Beijing massacre that my

sister Sheung Woon, then seventy-seven years of age, arrived in Toronto as an immigrant, the last of my five sisters to settle permanently in North America. Partly in jest and partly in earnest, I started calling her 'Duchess', a nickname befitting her aura of dignity and respectability which was gleefully endorsed by her children, two of whom have settled in the United States, one in Canada, and one in Australia. Before long, I began making some pocket money at mah-jong out of the elderly 'Duchess'. Unfortunately, geography prevented me from taking similar advantage of my other sisters, Josephine in San Francisco, Margaret in Vancouver, and Winnie and Rosalind in Michigan.

I had for some time been toying with the idea of writing a family biography in memory of my parents. In the event I began scribbling in January 1990, manually and laboriously. During my working life, I had written virtually nothing of note, apart from business-related matters. It was a real challenge for me to tell a meaningful human story for the first time, especially in the early stages of the project. Fortunately, my brothers and sisters readily came to my assistance by sharing with me (sometimes through marathon telephone calls from Hong Kong) their reflections on people and events in days gone by. At the same time, my friend and former colleague Eleanor DeWolf took a personal interest in proofreading the manuscript. I must say that learning to do word processing and making a habit of painstakingly consulting the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* have added immensely to my enjoyment of writing.

I was not even halfway through my story when Josephine passed away in September 1990, after a brief and courageous struggle with cancer. Half-jokingly, P.T. said to me over the phone that I had better make every effort to finish the project sooner if I wanted to be sure that there would still be some brothers and sisters left to read the completed account. Unfortunately, he too was stricken with cancer a year later and had to undergo immediate surgery.

With P.T.'s serious illness in mind, I speeded up my work and early in 1992 brought the finished manuscript with me to Hong Kong. The first words he said to me after reading it were 'Brian, how it brings back memories!'. I was introduced to Mrs. So, the President of New Island Printing Company Ltd. and a close friend of both P.T. and Patrick. A few months later, *All Our Yesterdays: A Song of My Parents* appeared in print as a private publication. Mrs. So took us by surprise when she decided to waive the agreed charge for the production of the book, as her contribution to the family biography. It was a gesture of goodwill to the Yu brothers that was greatly appreciated.

Between 1991 and 1994 I went back to Hong Kong four times in all to see P.T. who, despite his deteriorating condition, never gave in to despair. He passed away in February 1996. He left behind three daughters, his wife having predeceased him by many years. This is how I will remember him:

P.T. grew up with Patrick and me on intimate terms at 15/17 Shelley Street and, during the 1930s, the three of us were inseparable. He was the eldest and most mature of the Three Fishes all of whom made their mark at Wah Yan College. He was both a brilliant student in Economics and a popular undergraduate at the University of Hong Kong. After the fall of Hong Kong, he was my cheerful and unflappable leader when he and I made the hazardous journey together into Free China. For the rest of the war he served his country well as a staff officer in the Nationalist Army.

As a resourceful high school teacher in the early postwar years, he earned the affection of his students and won the goodwill of his colleagues. In the course of his lucrative legal career, he was unspoilt by worldly success and unruffled by personal disappointment. Resolutely, he came to terms with the scourge of cancer right from the start and, for almost five years, bore affliction with fortitude and equanimity.

Mamie and I attended yet another wedding in London when Patrick's younger son Dominic and Janice Lo were married in the Farm Street Church in 1993. Patrick and Lucia then took us to Oxford as their guests at *Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons*. Included in the party were Patrick's elder son Denis and his wife Marianne, and our children Teresa and Peter. Together, the group went on a sentimental tour of Merton College, lingering for quite a while in Merton Garden, within sight of the rooms that had once been occupied by my father and by Patrick.

We were delighted when Sir John and Lady Habakkuk came and joined us for tea at the hotel. Prior to retirement, Sir John (formerly Pembroke don and lecturer in Economic History) had for many years been Principal of Jesus College, Oxford and, at one time, Vice-Chancellor of the University. He and I had not seen each other for several decades. How memories of Pembroke crowded in upon

me as we chatted happily about old times! The next day he personally walked us through Jesus and All Souls and, for well over an hour, enlightened us with interesting anecdotes of people and events relating to those two colleges. It was the most enjoyable of my many visits to Oxford.

At other times during our stay in England, Mamie and I had dinner at the Travellers' Club in London with Geoff and Taffy Smith; spent a night at Colchester with Martin and Diana Knowles; and were reunited first with the Saunders in Sawston, Cambridge, and then the Hudsons in Liverpool. While in Cambridge, I took Mamie with me to call on Tony Camps who was his usual charming and dignified self. He passed away three years later.

In the fall of 1994 we had the distinct pleasure of welcoming Wilf and Joan Saunders into our home. The four of us spent a lovely week chasing fall colours along my favourite route across northern New York and up and down Vermont. By way of contrast, we also went for a leisurely walk in Edwards Gardens, not far from our home in Toronto, where fall colours in abundance could also be seen and savoured, but in a restricted setting and at close quarters.

Since then I have done hardly any travelling, although my heart keeps telling me to make another return visit to England. Happily, Cambridge came to Toronto when the Master of Pembroke, Sir Roger Tomkys, hosted a dinner on March 31, 1998 at the King Edward Hotel, to commemorate the 650th anniversary of the signing of the College's Charter of Foundation. A dozen or more old members of Pembroke from Ontario and elsewhere turned up for the rare occasion. I stood out, for what it is worth, as the oldest by far of them all.

In my story I have been making frequent mention of my English friends. It has been a particular source of joy to me that, through the years, Mamie has become acquainted with all of them. However, our little world in Toronto would not be half as happy and bright without the many Canadian friends whom we keep seeing every now and again, such as the Barnes and the Browns in Ottawa, former Shell Canada colleagues and their spouses, old neighbours on Argonne Crescent, and fellow-immigrants from Hong Kong (almost all formidable mah-jong adversaries!). Life also perks up whenever we have visitors from abroad.

Above all, Mamie and I are truly fortunate to have remained close to our children in every sense of the word. All three are leading a full life and pursuing their Canadian dreams in Toronto. By chance they all live within easy driving distance of the empty nest on Argonne Crescent, and hardly a week or fortnight goes by without

our seeing one or other of them. Year after year, we always get together especially to celebrate Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

A career professional in telecommunications, Teresa moved on steadily from Royal Trust to ROLM (1986), to IBM (1989), and to Norstan (1992). Since 1995 she has been operating as a private consultant. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Telecommunications Consultants Association and the chairperson of its Public Relations Committee. She is a keen traveller, her favourite vacation destinations being England and Austria. She has attended summer courses at both Oxford and Cambridge and also at Canterbury. She is already planning her next trip to England in 1999. Brian Eng, her husband, works for Compaq as Manager, Financial Planning.

Following the arrival of Christine in 1985 and Catherine in 1987, Marian has been a dedicated full-time wife and mother, with never a dull moment in her tightly-scheduled daily life. Her husband Joseph Yao is a Senior Planning Analyst with the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. As for Christine and Catherine, their cheerful dispositions, their winning ways, their progress at school, at ballet, at figure-skating, at piano, or at karate, and their hugs and kisses for grandma and grandpa add relish to our existence. Our love for them is something which only doting grandparents are capable of understanding:

Some feelings are to mortals given
With less of earth in them than heaven.

As ill luck would have it, Marian was diagnosed with a brain tumour in October 1998, which necessitated immediate surgery. Mercifully, the five-hour operation was successful, and the tumour was benign. Since then she has been making a slow but steady recovery. The sudden crisis in Marian's life has brought me closer to God, for which I am truly thankful. As the Chinese saying goes, 'When in desperation, embrace Buddha's feet.'

Peter began his career with Manufacturers' Life in 1985. Four years later he joined Canada Life, where he is now a Senior Systems Analyst in Asset Liability Management. He too has been visiting England regularly and making good use of his camera everywhere he goes. He now knows much more about England, certainly in terms of geography and architecture, than I do. Ever since his university days, he and I have been calling each other by our pseudonyms, he being 'Holmes', and I, naturally, the bumbling and well-meaning 'Dr. Watson', his trusted friend and loyal partner in an undefined

and ongoing real-life adventure.

It is now time for me to pause under the golden arch, reflect upon the past and count my blessings. I think of my father, whose precept and example set the style and tone of my aspirations. I feel most grateful to my wife, friend, and companion of almost fifty years, who has lovingly stood by me in all my endeavours. I remember the Irish Jesuits who imparted to me the treasures of their faith, Arthur Walton who provided me with a priceless ticket to England, Tony Camps who changed my Cambridge dream into an unforgettable reality, and Leslie Barnes who lent me courage to turn my back on the Old World and who launched me in the New.

Over thirty years have gone by since we arrived in Canada. With God's help, our efforts in this great country, whose quality of life is the envy of the world, have borne fruit gradually and in so many ways, and given us cause for joy, satisfaction, happiness and contentment. We have found our little pot of gold at the end of the Canadian rainbow.

It is as a happy immigrant and a proud Canadian that I conclude the writing of my memoirs.

There is a tide in the affairs of men
which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

Glossary of Names in Chinese

Chapter 1

Taishan 台山

Guangzhou 廣州

Chapter 2

Yu Wan alias Yat Man

余芸、字逸民

Lam Lan Sin 林蘭僊

Chapter 3

Sun Yat Sen 孫(中山)逸仙

Pak Chuen (Yu) 余伯泉

Lingnan Primary School

嶺南小學

St. Stephen's College

聖士提反中學

Wuchang 武昌

Sheung Woon (Yu) 余湘皖

Chapter 5

Law Yan Pak 羅仁伯

Inspector of Vernacular Schools

漢文視學官

Chapter 6

Lam Pak Chung 林伯聰

Sir Alexander Grantham

葛量洪爵士

Sir David Trench 戴麟趾爵士

Chapter 7

Hung Kwan (Josephine Yu)

余洪鈞

Man Sang (Margaret Yu) 余敏生

Ping Tsung (P.T. Yu) 余平仲

Shuk Siu (Patrick Yu) 余叔韶

Kwai Ko (Brian Yu) 余季皋

Wing Nin (Winnie Yu) 余詠年

Kwun Ming (Rosalind Yu)

余昆鳴

Chapter 8

Arbuthnot Road 亞畢諾道

Coronation Terrace 加冕台

Caine Road 堅道

Shelley Street 些利街

Mosque Street 摩囉廟街

Italian Convent 意大利嬰堂

Sacred Heart School 聖心書院

Wah Yan College 華仁書院

Anthony (Yu) 余國藩

Chapter 9

Hong Kong Fish Company

香港海鮮公司

Des Voeux Road Central

德輔道中

The Lutanist's Lament

《琵琶行》

Prince's Cafe 太子餐館

China Building 華人行

Queen's Road Central

皇后大道中

South China 'A' 南華 A

Queen's Theatre 皇后戲院

King's Theatre 娛樂戲院

Chinese Merchants' Club

華商會所

Chinese Swimming Club

華人游泳會

Tak Cheong Tailors 德祥洋服店

Fire Brigade Building 滅火局

Chapter 10

General Yu Han Mou

余漢謀上將

Chiang Kai Shek 蔣介石
 Norma Au 歐授真
 S.Y. Tong 唐紹元
 Robinson Road 羅便臣道
 Tsui Yan Sou 徐仁壽
 Mr. Chau 周先生
 Mak Kwun Chak 麥君澤
 Chow Ching Lam 周清林
 Wong Chin Wah 黃展華
 Ricci Hall 利瑪竇宿舍

Chapter 11

Sir Mark Young 楊慕祺爵士
 Mrs. S.Y. Liang 梁余文芳
 Mr. and Mrs. Tang Man Chiu
 鄧文超
 Kennedy Road 堅尼地道
 Sai Wan 柴灣

Chapter 12

Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity
 Area 大東亞共榮圈
 Chongqing 重慶
 Kwangchouwan 廣州灣
 Leizhou Bandao (Leichow
 Peninsula) 雷州半島
 Chikan 赤坎
 Guilin 桂林
 Liuzhou 柳州
 Margaret(Tong) 唐鏞銓
 Lena So 蘇小姐
 Shaoguan 韶關
 Lieutenant General Lee Yin Woh
 李彥和中將
 Sun Yat Sen University 中山大學
 Pingshi 坪石
 Louis Yung 翁顯良
 Ip sisters(Lillian and Anita)
 葉氏姊妹
 Elizabeth Liang 梁壽熙

Chin Hon Ngi 陳漢儀
 Lingnan University 嶺南大學
 Lingnan Village 嶺大村
 Wu-li-ting 五里亭
 Mr. Sedgwick 石智益
 Guiyang 桂陽
 The Model Regiment 教導團
 Chang Le Village 長樂村
 True Light Middle School
 眞光中學
 General Wong Chun Kou
 黃鎮球將軍
 David Lam See Chai 林思齊
 David Cheung 張達鵬
 Huang-tian-ba 黃田壩
 Meilu 梅綠
 Longnan 龍南
 'Weaklings do rest,
 Strong men don't linger'
 "虧佬請坐，
 壯士不留"
 Longchuan 龍川
 Chinese 'puppet'detachments 僞軍
 'An inch of fatherland,
 An inch of blood !
 A hundred thousand students,
 A hundred thousand warriors!'
 "一寸山河一寸血
 十萬青年十萬軍"
 Yanqian 崖前
 Army Commander Mok 莫軍長
 Yun Wah (Lee) 李潤華
 Marion (Lee) 李韻仙
 Margaret(Lee) 李慧仙
 Martin (Lee) 李柱銘
 Michael (Lee) 李烈基
 Wong Wai Wah 王蕙華
 Dr. Wong Tak Kwong
 王德光醫生
 Huizhou 惠州
 Mao Zedong 毛澤東

Chapter 13

Kwok Chu (So) 蘇國柱
 C.K.Hung & Co 鴻祥敬行
 Hop Hing Peanut Oil Factory
 合興花生油廠
 Simon and Lillian Li 李福善
 Mrs. Yong Shook Lin 楊余德芳
 Pung How (Yong) 楊邦孝
 Lee Kuan Yew 李光耀
 Noel Ho Nga Ming 何雅明
Three Hundred Tang Poems
 《唐詩三百首》
 Tang Chi Ong School of Chinese
 鄧志昂中文學校
 Chan Kwan Po 陳君保
 Professor Ma Kiam 馬鑑教授
 Tai Sang Bank 大生銀號

Chapter 14

General Ho Ying Chin
 何應欽將軍
 China Emporium 中華百貨公司
 Hollywood Road 荷里活道
 Jui-Heung-Yuen 敘香園
 York Road 約道

Chapter 15

Chris Patten 彭定康
 Mrs. Anson Chan 陳方安生
 Asiatic Petroleum Co
 亞細亞火油公司
 Shell Company of Hong Kong
 香港蜆殼石油公司
 Mamie Leung Oi Mui 梁愛梅
 Blue Pool Road 藍塘道
 Chung Kay (Teresa Yu) 余鍾期
 Yiu Mei (Marian Yu) 余耀楣
 Dick Frost 霍樂思

Chapter 17

Bobby Tong 唐卓忻

Chapter 18

Kwok Wai (Peter Yu) 余國威

Chapter 19

Maryknoll Sisters' School
 瑪利諾修女學校
 Shell House 蜆殼大廈
 Dr. Timothy Kong 江海傑醫生
 Dr. Choh Ming Li 李卓敏博士

Chapter 20

Siu Man Cheuk 蕭文卓
 Yung, Yu, Yuen 翁余阮律師樓
 Yong Shook Lin 楊旭齡
 Yan Pak School 仁伯學校
 Maryknoll Fathers' School
 瑪利諾神父學校
 Lucia Fung 馮育堅
 Dr. Peter Wong 黃惠陽醫生
 Chiang Ching Kuo 蔣經國
 Magdalene So 蘇怡萱
 Denis (Yu Kwok Chung) 余國充
Hsi Yu Chi 《西遊記》

Chapter 21

Lee Ka Tit 李家鐵

Chapter 23

Joseph Yao 姚燦榕

Chapter 24

Karen (Yu) 余玉書
 Dr. Peter Lau 劉永基
 Dominica (Yu) 余夏卿
 Trevor Yang 楊子訊
 Dominic (Yu) 余國靖
 Janice Lo 羅麗盈
 Marianne (Yeo) 楊美蓮
 Christine (Yao) 姚穎思
 Catherine (Yao) 姚敏思
 Mrs. So 蘇周艷屏

